

# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

## DIRTY WEATHER

by Rufus F. King

*Deep Stuff on a  
Deeper Sea*



10¢ PER  
COPY

OCTOBER 7

BY THE  
YEAR \$4.00

"We are advertised by our loving friends"

A black and white portrait of a baby, Helen Marie Welsh, looking directly at the camera. The baby has dark hair and is wearing a light-colored dress with a white collar. The portrait is framed by a decorative border.

Helen Marie Welsh,  
Sharon, Mass.

For your Baby, use the  
**Mellin's Food Method  
of Milk Modification**

*Let us send you our book, "The Care and Feeding of  
Infants," and a Free Trial Bottle of Mellin's Food.*

Mellin's Food Company,

Boston, Mass.

## Be a Certificated Electrical Expert



# Your Future is in Electricity

## EARN \$3500 to \$10000 a Year

Trained "Electrical Experts" are in great demand at the highest salaries, and the opportunities for advancement and a big success in this line are the greatest ever known.

"Electrical Experts" earn \$70 to \$200 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big paying positions.

**Learn at Home to Earn \$12.00 to \$30.00 a Day**

Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary Electricians—to boss Big Jobs—the jobs that pay. You too, can learn to fill one of these jobs—spare-time only, is needed. Be an "Electrical Expert"—Earn \$70 to \$200 a week.

### Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School graduate. If you can read and write English, my course will make you a big success. It is the most simple, thorough, and successful Electrical Course in ex-

istence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from \$70 to \$200 a week.

### Some Features of My Course That Make SUCCESS Certain

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2. Free Electrical Outfit—Finest outfit ever sent out for home experiment, and practical use.
3. Free Employment Service. (Helps you get a good job.)
4. Free Consulting Service. (No chance to get stuck on anything, while studying or afterward.)
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9. All supplies furnished free of cost.
10. Cash Refund Guarantee Bond.

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not satisfied you ever made.

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As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to get the best positions at the highest salaries. Hundreds of my students are now earning \$3,500 to \$10,000 a year. Many are successful ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS.

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So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you too can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition if, when you have finished my course you are it was the best investment

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L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer

CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS  
Dept. 177 2150 Lawrence Ave. Chicago, Ill.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer  
Chicago Engineering Works, Dept. 177  
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:—Send at once the "Vital Facts" containing Sample Lessons, your Big Book, and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

## The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLVI

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NUMBER 2

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## CAST E

BY W. A. FRASER

A novel of a vast intrigue that pulses with the grim mysticism of India; a romance of a man holding honor above love, and a princess preserving her caste against both.  
THIS GREAT STORY BEGINS NEXT WEEK.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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## Your Choice, On Trial

**T**HE Wurlitzer plan gives you *any instrument* with a complete musical outfit for a week's Free Trial in your own home. No obligation to buy. Return the instrument at our expense at the end of the week, if you decide not to keep it. Trial won't cost you a penny.

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Payments are arranged in small monthly sums. A few cents a day will pay for your instrument and complete outfit. The Wurlitzer plan gives you all at direct cost. You get the outfit and instrument practically for the cost of the instrument alone.

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### Complete Outfits

The new plan includes with the instrument everything that you need—velvet and plush lined carrying case with lock and key, all accessories and extra parts, self instructor, book of musical selections, etc.

### A Wurlitzer Outfit

This shows the Wurlitzer Violin Outfit. Case is professional style, beautifully finished. Complete outfits like this are now furnished with all Wurlitzer instruments.

Every musical instrument known, including Pianos and Victrolas, is embraced in the Wurlitzer plan.



## Send for New Catalog

Every known instrument illustrated and fully described in detail with prices, monthly payments and free trial blank. More information and pictures of instruments than in any other book published. (Also complete catalog of accessories, repairs, strings and all needs for replacements for any instrument made. Instant mail service.) Book is absolutely free. No obligation. Send the coupon now.

**The Rudolph Wurlitzer Company**

Cincinnati Chicago New York San Francisco

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**THE RUDOLPH WURLITZER CO., Dept. 2277**  
 117 E. 4th St., Cincinnati 120 W. 42nd St., New York  
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 Send me your new catalog with illustrations in color and full description of the Wurlitzer Complete Outfits and details of the free trial and easy payment offer.

Name.....

Address.....

(State musical instrument in which you are especially interested)

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**Photo Pillow Tops, Portraits, Frames, Sheet Pictures, Pennants, Religious Pictures, Medallions, Merchants Signs, Specialties, Waterproof Aprons, Gold Window Letters, Catalog Free.** 30 days credit. Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk K-10, Chicago.

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**MAKE \$5000 EVERY YEAR—\$2000 IN SPARE TIME.** You share profits besides. Show "Weather Monarch" Raincoats and Waterproof Overcoats. Ask about "Duel Coat" (No. 999). Free raincoat for your own use. Associated Raincoat Agents Inc., C-448 North Wells, Chicago.

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**MAKE \$75.00 A WEEK AND UP TAKING ORDERS FOR OUR FINE ALL-WOOL TAILORED-TO-MEASURE SUITS AT \$29.75.** GUARANTEED REGULAR \$50.00 VALUES. Every order pays you a good profit, cash in hand. We supply finest selling outfit. If you're a hustler and think you can sell \$50.00 goods for \$29.75 get in touch with us at once. Address: Dept. 416, **PARK TAILORING CO., Chicago.**

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## MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

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**WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL?** Submit M88, at once to **Music Sales Company, Dept. 68, St. Louis, Mo.**

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**\$12.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular \$25.00 value.** We are making this bargain offer to prove our reasonable value in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make \$35.00 to \$40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. **AMERICAN MONROE CO., Dept. K-304, Chicago.**

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**AGENTS—\$15 A DAY—EASY, QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—\$10 WEEKLY BONUS—\$50 premium.** Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. **PAID DAILY.** **NEW ERA MFG. CO., 808 Madison St., Dept. 20-E, Chicago.**

**BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS** for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. **American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.**

**MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES.** Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. **Acme Letter Co., 2860 F Congress, Chicago.**

**AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan** is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. **Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.**

**AGENTS, Good Salary and Commission Selling "Rataxyl",** new Rat and Mouse Extirminator. Ready for use, no bait required, non-poisonous. Harmless to man, poultry, cat, dog, etc. Rodents die outside premises. No odor. Exclusive territory. **Empire Specialties Co., 1549 N. Wells, Dept. 304, Chicago, Ill.**

**Sell the latest nationally approved cooking utensil, the Squirs BROILET.** Sells on sight. Convenient to carry and show. \$90 profit weekly easy for live agents. Get full details from A. B. Squire Mfg. Corp., 280 Madison Ave., New York.

**AGENTS \$25.00 A WEEK FOR SPARE TIME.** Suits \$13.45, paid up. **Write for full information and sample.** **CHICAGO TAILORS ASSOCIATION, Dept. 107, Chicago.**

**GREATEST SENSATION!** Eleven-piece soap and toilet set, selling for \$1.15 with \$1 dresser's set. **FREE TO EACH CUSTOMER; other unique plans.** **E. M. DAVIS COMPANY, Dept. 58, Chicago.**

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**SALES AGENTS WANTED** in every county to give all or spare time. Positions worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. **Novelty Outfitters Co., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.**

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## AUTOMOBILES

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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**Until You Are Placed  
in a Position Paying**

**\$250 to \$300 Per Month**

**—Chief Draftsman Dobe**

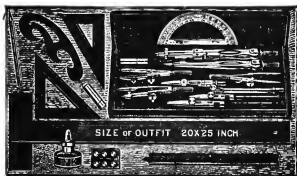


Write and I'll tell you how I make you a first-class, big-money-earning draftsman in a very few months! I do this by a method no other man nor institution can imitate. I give you personal training at home by mail. And I mean just what I say—I train you until you are actually placed in a position paying from \$250.00 to \$300.00 per month. Six thousand draftsmen are wanted every month. Hurry up and register so you can start earning.

**I Give YOU  
FREE**

**This \$25<sup>00</sup> Outfit  
of Drafting Tools**

High-grade plated instruments. Every one you need. Packed in a handsome plush lined case. Just the kind I use myself. Write to me. I'm giving it entirely and absolutely free.



**Send This Free  
Coupon To Me!**

It costs you nothing but a stamp to send the coupon for my free book, "Successful Draftsmanship" that tells you all. It tells you how my students get the good positions and how I can afford to train you until you get YOUR position. Remember, 6,000 men wanted every month. So hurry. Register early because I can take only a few students. Send coupon NOW!

**Chief Draftsman Dobe**

Div. 1457, 4001 Broadway, Chicago, Ill.

**Chief Draftsman Dobe**

Div. 1457, 4001 Broadway, Chicago, Ill.

Without any obligation whatsoever, please mail your book, "Successful Draftsmanship," and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Instruction" offer to a few students.

Name.....

Address.....



## You Too Can Now Have Glorious Wavy Hair!

**New Liquid Discovery Quickly Gives You a Wealth  
of Soft, Glistening Curly Hair.**

No longer need you envy the girl with beautiful wavy hair. For beauty experts have at last found a new harmless liquid, which gives even the most stubborn hair a wonderfully natural waviness and curliness.

This new liquid makes your hair fall in soft, fluffy waves and silky curls. It adds a wonderful new charm, youthfulness and beauty to your appearance. No fuss—no bother. Simply moisten the hair with a few drops of this wonderful new liquid, called Domino Curling Fluid. One application will keep your hair wavy and in curl usually for a week or more. Why ruin your hair with hot irons, or pay big fees to hair dressers? Try this new harmless method, and see if your friends aren't amazed at the wonderful improvement in your appearance.

### Send No Money!

The regular price of Domino Curling Fluid is \$2.50 a bottle. But on this special introductory offer we will send you a full size bottle for only \$1.45, plus a few cents postage. Send no money—just the coupon. Pay the postman on arrival. Then if not perfectly satisfied with results simply return it and your money will be instantly refunded. Mail coupon now, before this special offer is withdrawn.

**DOMINO HOUSE, 269 S. Ninth Street  
Dept. C-4310, Philadelphia, Pa.**

Please send me one \$2.50 bottle of Domino Curling Fluid. When the postman hands it to me, I will pay him only \$1.45 plus a few cents postage (in full payment). If for any reason I am not satisfied I will return it within five days and you agree to promptly refund my money.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

If you wish, you may send cash with coupon and save the postage.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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**SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY** writing shorewards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. Wilcox Methods, Ltd., 64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada.

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**FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored)**, \$140—\$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.

**All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 60**, willing to accept Government Positions, \$117—\$190, traveling or stationary. Write Mr. Ozmunt, 198, St. Louis, immediately.

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**PATENTS.** If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

**INVENTIONS WANTED ON CASH OR ROYALTY BASIS.** Patented or unpatented. We have been in business 24 years. References. Adam Fisher Mfg. Company, 249, St. Louis, Mo.

**PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED.** A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2273-J Woolworth Bldg., N. Y.

### SONG POEMS WANTED

**SONG WRITERS—HAVE YOU IDEAS?** If so, winner in Herald-Examiner's \$10,000.00 Song Contest (Nationally-known "Song World" Editor) wants your song poems for guaranteed proposition. Casper Nathan, 827 Garlick Theatre Bldg., Chicago.

**WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG.** We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poems to our office, NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

### STAMPS

**FOREIGN STAMPS FREE**—Fine Packet from all over the world with big price list of sets, packets, stamp supplies, etc., send 2c postage. GRAY STAMP CO., Station B, Toronto, Canada.

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**BEST PAYING TRADES—LEARN SIGN PAINTING—**Pictorial Painting—Auto Painting—Showercard Writing—Decorating—Paperhanging—Graining—Marbling. Catalog Free. The Big Chicago Painting School, 152 W. Austin Avenue, Chicago.

### WANTED

Cash for Old Gold, Platinum, Silver, Diamonds, Liberty Bonds, War, Thrift, Unused Postage Stamps, False Teeth, Magneto Points, Jobs, any valuables. Mail in today. Cash sent return mail. Goods returned in 7-10 days if you are not satisfied. Ohio Smelting Co., 301 Hippodrome Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

### WANTED TO BUY

Mail Us Your Discarded Jewelry, Gold Crowns and Bridges, Watches, Diamonds, Silver, Platinum, War Saving Stamps and Old False Teeth. Money sent by return mail. Packages sold 4 to 12 days and returned if our offer is refused. United States Smelting Works (The Old Reliable), Dept 26, Chicago, Ill.

# Going up?

AGE 20 \$1,000

AGE 30 \$1,400

AGE 30 \$3,000

AGE 40 \$4,500

AGE 50 \$6,000

AGE 50 \$900

## -or down?

**H**ERE is your future charted for you, based on the actual average earnings of trained and untrained men.

Alike at 20, yes—but how far apart at 30 and 40! How tragically far apart at 50! What a story of success and failure is painted into those faces!

Which way will you go? *Up*, through training, to a position that means more money and more responsibility as the years go by? Or *down*, through lack of training, into the ranks of the poorly paid?

It rests entirely with you which way you go. It is within your power to decide right now just about where you are going to be one, three, five, ten, fifteen years from now.

The *Up Road* means a better position—more money—more comforts for your family and yourself.

The *Down Hill Road* or the *Stand Still* means a perpetual struggle for even the necessities of life—the tragic fear of losing your position—the realization that the years are rushing by and you have wasted the opportunity that will never come again.

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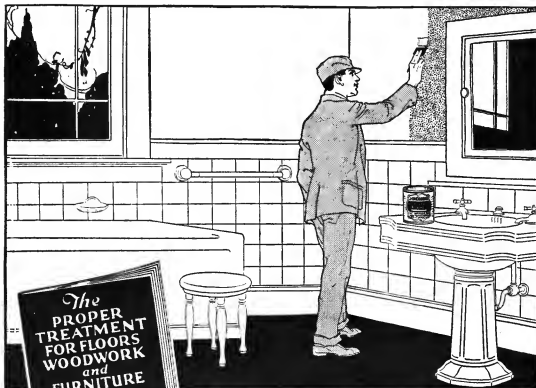
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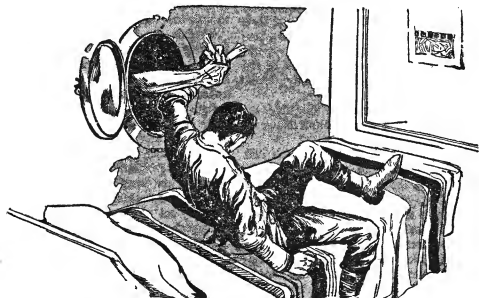
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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLVI

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1922

NUMBER 2



## *Dirty Weather*

By RUFUS F. KING

### CHAPTER I.

#### MONSOON.

IT was the end of the northeast monsoon, that bitter, dreary wind which sweeps across the reaches of the North Pacific and the China Sea to chill the blood and hearts of seamen with its endless, drizzling rains; to breed discomfort, discontent, and thoughts of mysteries — of nameless dreads.

Smooth, long-sloped swells gently rose

and fell beneath a bank of thick fog that had closed in from the eastward. Somewhere in the general position of latitude forty north and longitude one hundred and seventy east a solitary vessel pursued her course toward China.

Peter Rutledge, chief mate aboard the American freighter *China Queen*, read the message scrawled upon a torn slip of paper for the third time. He was seated on the bunk in his cabin, his back toward an open

port through which the fog strayed in with hesitant, wavering streamers of gray.

this. Save me  
man with the scar  
ived. I am not dead  
mad from this horror  
avert

During the twelve years he had been at sea Rutledge had never been thrown in the path of its equal. He had come across a few queer ones, too, in his time—mysteries, bred upon the deep, that had lingered their puzzling span of moments upon the surface and then had disappeared below, unsolved. There had been that affair of the watchman at Hongkong — funny devils, Chinks, but this—

"Damn!" he muttered, wriggling his large body into a more comfortable position.

He had dismissed, at first, the idea that the message—blown to his feet by a stray wind through the fog as he had gone aft to read the log—might be some practical joke. He had felt that it was serious, real; that it meant precisely what it stated.

Furthermore, on the way forward again, there had been the uncomfortable conviction that some one was following him—a figure, blurred in the mist when he had glanced over his shoulder; the strange, swift patter of stealthy feet; a slight brushing of fingers along the back of his shirt upon entering the passage amidships.

He had wheeled about and stared blindly back into the fog, into that heavy, malignant mist that closed him in smothering vapors, shrouds of dead evils, only to see nothing.

He had wanted to shout, to call out, "Who's there?" but had resisted the impulse through fear of seeming foolish. He had also entertained the disquieting certitude that had he called out, there would have been no answer.

Commencing with a faint hiss, developing into a shuddering sigh, and from that into a loud vibrating roar, the fog signal tore its warning through the blanketing mists.

I am not dead.

Why, Rutledge argued, should such a statement be found aboard a tramp

steamer, manned by a healthy and distinctly alive crew in the solitudes of the Pacific Ocean?

And who was the "man with the scar?"

He would take this singular paper with its mystery to the captain. The old man would know what to do about it. Perhaps he would laugh at it—and at Rutledge!

Rutledge, like a good many men who are well built and above the average in size, was extremely sensitive in regard to being made to appear foolish.

Furthermore, he was young—young even for his years, which numbered twenty-four; young in the manner of men who pass their lives aboard boats at sea and who retain in a marked fashion, even late in life, the callowness of boyhood, the tender nerves of youth still fresh and raw, close beneath the surface of their wind-scarred skins, easily to be wounded, to be hurt.

Hadn't he better wait, he wondered, until there was something more tangible to go by? What a laugh there would be if it were a joke!

He pictured, vividly and uncomfortably, the scene that would take place at supper—the old man at the head of the table, grim, severe, breaking suddenly into one of his unaccustomed bursts of harsh laughter; Harris, the second mate, his red cheeks puffed out, the tears helplessly streaming from his protrudent, china-blue eyes; MacDonald, the third mate, sitting there braying like a jackass; then Sparks, the wireless operator, an engaging young devil of blatant and occasionally distressing immaturity, rolling in an ecstasy of infantile mirth alongside him on the settee. It would be a jolly party.

"Thank the Lord the engineers eat separate!" came into his mind.

Worst of all, Sparks would be sure to run a double-leader about it in the *Wireless Press* for the delectation of all on board. The sheet was an erratic affair, highly scandalous in nature, dealing more largely with affairs on board than with the duller doings of the world at large—affairs meticulously culled in frequent ear-flapping promenadings fore and aft on the part of its editor, who was a respecter neither of persons nor personages.

Rutledge could picture the headlines, typed in capitals:

**AMAZING DISCOVERY UNEARTHED BY  
CHIEF MATE**

or

**DEAD FROM THE NECK UP**

No, sir! It would never do. He would wait, do a little investigating on his own hook. Perhaps he would make a few inquiries here and there among the men.

He examined the paper itself on which the message had been written. It seemed vaguely familiar to him. At some time or other he had seen another piece similar to it. It was a dirty, cream-colored paper, streaked with faint, yellow lines. Where?

From the way the paper was torn it might have been snatched from some one's hand during a struggle.

The thing was too cleverly gotten up for a joke—the details of it. Then, if it were real, something must be done about it, and that at once.

Why, he complained, should this bother be thrust upon him now, in this insufferable fog, when the watches on the bridge were dismal enough? You couldn't see ten feet beyond the dodger—and the strain on the nerves was so great.

Now if it were nice, cheery weather, a fair breeze and the skies blue, he wouldn't have minded monkeying with such deviltry at all. As a matter of fact, he would have tossed the paper over the side with a laugh—the laugh being for the benefit of the eager ears of the presumably concealed jokester.

It was too late to do that now. A definite conviction of reality about the thing had gripped him.

"Mad with this horror." That was clear enough, but "—avern?"

Rutledge went through the alphabet.

At one stage in his career he had held visions of becoming a poet. They had been rose-tinted visions that had been inspired by a decidedly rose-tinted person whom he had met one night in the Seaman's Mission, out Boca way in Buenos Aires, at one of their excessively polite, and excessively dull, *musicales* for visiting sailors.

That had been many years ago. Certainly three.

He had met her four times in all. At the fourth she had confided to him that he ought to give up the sea and become a poet. According to her lipped divulgings the main essentials to becoming one of the creatures were a brace of understanding eyes, preferably blue, and an ability to tack on letters to the after-end of a word until it made sense and the proper rime at the same time. He had thought it wonderful.

He had kept right on thinking it wonderful, until a certain strong-minded blonde in Christiania had engulfed him in her gilded meshes.

He had then entered the period—such a bitterly exalted sort of a period—when he chose to consider himself a woman hater. He was still in it. He had nothing left to learn about them; the blonde had taken care of that—and incidentally his bank roll.

However, the rose-tinted one's lesson remained, so he tacked on the entire twenty-six letters to "—avern."

The results offered the words "cavern" and "tavern." Neither seemed to possess any sensible connection with the message. On shore, yes. The person might be confined in a cavern or in a tavern, but on a ship—

Wasn't it his *duty* to inform the old man? He could do it in such a way as to give the impression at first that he imagined the matter to be nothing but a hoax. Then he could swing the point of view around to the possible seriousness of it.

The cabin darkened.

Rutledge gathered himself with a start. His muscles tightened to firm marble, as if to ward off some threatening danger.

He felt that someone was on the point of attacking him. There was no one else in the cabin, which had grown darker as though the light coming through one of the ports had been obscured, blocked out.

The fog couldn't have thickened that much—

A hand with fingers of steel gripped his throat, choking back the cry that smothered on his lips. He felt a sickening blow—sinking—sinking—

An arm reached downward to its fullest extent through the porthole, and grasping Rutledge's hand, twisted the torn slip of paper from it.

The fog, again unobstructed, filtered in, beading the unnatural pallor of Rutledge's face with its dampness, and touching with its sensitive feelers the thin line of blood that spilled slowly down across his forehead.

It was the end of the northeast monsoon—that bitter, dreary breeder of things that are strange and beyond the knowledge of man.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE DIRK.

AT precisely ten minutes after four Harris, the second mate, consulted the dial of his watch, compared it with the clock in the wheelhouse, announced indignantly to the waves at large: "Strike me pink if he ain't a bloomin' genius at it!" and spat across the dodger.

Save for the raucous blare of the fog signal shredding the silence with monotonous regularity, it was abominably still—unearthly. The China Queen seemed to fail in motion, to pulse restlessly within damp layers of dismal obscurities.

At fifteen minutes after four Harris whistled sharply for the sailor on watch, and crossed to the head of the ladder. After the usual delay an engagingly youthful face materialized out of the fog and floated upward toward him from below.

"Sir?" inquired the face.

"Be good enough to suggest to Mr. Rutledge that eight bells were struck exactly fifteen—*eighteen* minutes ago."

"Yes, sir."

The face placidly melted from view.

Harris resigned himself to a further encroachment on his "watch below." This wasn't the first time that the mate had been late in relieving him, by no and many means.

It was irritating, annoying. As for fifteen, *eighteen* minutes—and it would probably stretch into twenty or twenty-five—this was going just one dash beyond the

pale. It was enough to turn a gentle-souled seaman into one of those Russian creatures who ramp about tearing people's hair out by the handful. The thing was piracy pure and simple.

For the moment the mate ceased to be a human being as far as Harris was concerned. He had been transmuted into a coughdrop.

Wouldn't he, Harris, get even though, when he got his ticket! He'd be a "bucko" mate for your whiskers! He'd pull a few linger-longers to a fare-thee-well and then some, and you could bet your bottom peso on that!

A hasty clattering up the latter produced a vision of the sailor on watch developing along the bridge with startling speed, much like an over-exposed plate.

"He's been bitten." Harris solved the phenomenon at once. Such an exhibition of haste was unnatural.

"Sir!"

"Well?"

"He's like dead, sir!"

Harris snorted.

"Did you rush up here to tell me that? Why didn't you wake him up?"

"He's bleedin'—been hit on the head somethin' awful 'n knocked for a goal—yes, sir!"

"What's this? Who? How?"

"The mate, sir."

"Where is he?"

Harris became efficiently alert.

"In his bunk in a heap."

"Told the captain?"

"No, sir."

"Tell him! And get MacDonald to relieve me at once!" He hurled this additional command after the evanescent figure of the sailor.

Harris stared hard out into the fog, as if seeking to wrest solution from it.

Rutledge struck down.

Bleeding.

Two weeks more to China.

And, rising above all else, the spectral conviction that the matter was not the result of an accident, but of deliberate intent. When *that* sort of thing broke out at sea, you never could tell.

No, you just never could tell.

Below, in the mate's cabin, Captain Hendriks, Honk Wing, the steward, and Sparks, having done all they could to make Rutledge comfortable, stood in silence regarding the results of their work.

The mists, swirling diffidently about the cabin, hazed them into a group suggestive of the three witches in "Macbeth," with Rutledge for a caldron.

The captain, tall, gaunt, exhaling an air of tremendous brooding, stood rigidly in the center. Hong Wing, a Chinaman of an age anywhere between the forties and a hundred, his face smoothed to the rigidity of a mask, stood, eyes veiled, and stared with a sleepy intensity at Rutledge.

Sparks, a leggy, sunny-haired youngster, clenched his fists until his knuckles dotted in white the brown skin.

"I'll punch the livin' daylights out of him when I get him. I will, you know!"

Sparks ended the threat with a gulp. All that he asked for on earth, at that moment, was the exquisite privilege of putting the print of his ten fingers onto the neck and windpipe of the wretch who had been responsible for this bit of villainy to his friend.

For Rutledge and he were friends, side-kicks, in that complete fashion that makes for a friendship at sea where the confined nature of existence, especially on long passages, is conducive to a distortion, an intensifying of the emotions; where men are attracted to one another and held by unusual bonds, pairing off in the flush of the setting sun after supper is over to quiet parts of the deck and spinning yarns of loves and of hopes that are gone, conjecturing about the folks at home, unfolding tentative intimacies beneath the calmer magic of the wakening stars; where men are repelled from one another by animosities that are born of trifles, brooding during the endless hours, when one is left to thinking, into sullen hates, plans of revenge, violence, even death.

Hendriks vaguely commended this desire on the part of Sparks with a grunt.

Hong Wing, elevating his shoulders and his eyes an infinitesimal distance, inferred thereby that all happenings on earth, whether occurring on land or at sea,

whether to first officers of eleven thousand-ton ships or to mere mortals, were immutably and incomprehensibly in the hands of the gods.

"He was struck from behind. Probably never knew what hit him. It may have been an accident." There was not the slightest ring of conviction in this afterthought of Hendriks.

"I wish I'd been with him."

The trace of a smile flickered across Hendriks's face as he compared the slender figure of the boy beside him with the present-day replica of some ancient Viking stretched at length upon the bunk.

The silence grew oppressive. Hong Wing alone seemed at peace, to be curiously in accord with it.

"It's not as though he were a tyrant with the men." Hendriks referred to Rutledge. "It's not the outcome of a grudge on the part of one of them. No, it's something deeper, more subtle than that; something that we do not understand, steward."

"'Ees, sair?"

"Ask Mr. Harris to call all hands forward; everyone except the man at the wheel, the lookout, and those who are actually on duty in the engine room."

"'Ees, sair."

Hendriks sighed heavily. "We will do," he said, "what we can. Later, when Mr. Rutledge comes around—you will stay with him, Sparks?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Let me know if there is any change." Hendriks paused and sunk his eyes, for a moment, in Sparks. "Don't worry, youngster. He'll pull through all right. Got as many lives as a cat. Come, steward."

Sparks was alone with Rutledge.

A quarter of an hour passed.

By degrees a normal, healthy color had been returning beneath the ruddy bronze of Rutledge's cheeks. His eyelids moved uncertainly—opened.

"Hi, there, Rutledge! Peter! You hear me?"

Rutledge stared at the bellower for an appraising moment.

"What the hell do you think I do? You've got your mouth within six inches of my ear."

Sparks heaved a sigh of relief. Rutledge was distinctly on the highroad to recovery.

"What hit you?" he asked.

"One of the Philippine Islands."

"No kiddin'!"

Rutledge transfixed Sparks with his eye.

"I don't know what hit me, but there's a stiff on this boat who ain't dead."

"Oh—sure."

Sparks grew worried. The blow on the head must have been serious, must have deranged something. Rutledge was patently wandering in his tophamper.

"Here," Sparks said, "let me wet that there towel on your head again."

"My head is all right."

"Sure. Let me wet it, anyway."

"You think I'm nuts."

"Yeh—no. All you need is a nice, comfortable wet towel; then try to cork off—a good sleep's the—"

"See here, you long drink of water, I'm telling you this thing is serious. There's a mystery."

Sparks "shushed" his patient in a manner that was intended to be highly soothing. He also murmured sweet promises of hot milk and rum. His patient, however, persistently refused to be shushed, wet toweled, or posseted.

"Now see here, Sparks, cut out this ministering-angel, first-aid-to-the-wounded stuff and listen to me. I say there is a mystery, and one of the prettiest little mysteries you ever bucked up against at that."

Rutledge began to wax enthusiastic. As for Sparks, he continued to turn his very best hospital look toward the bunk and the balmy gentleman stretched out upon it.

"There ain't no such thing as a mystery, Peter. There ain't nothin' that happens in life that can't be trailed back to some cold, hard fact. You just take it from your Uncle Dudley, 'cause I know."

"I suppose," Rutledge remarked, witheringly, "if you suddenly came across a bit of paper floating loose around the deck, and on that there bit of paper you saw written a message—a mangled message—with such peculiar sayings as 'save me,' 'I am not dead,' 'mad from this horror,' 'man with the scar,' and the like in it, you wouldn't call that a mystery?"

It was a bit of a facer. It bent Sparks, kinked him, but failed to crush him.

"Are you meanin' to tell me straight, Pete Rutledge, that you picked up any such stuff as that on the deck of this here boat?"

"I am."

"Where is it?"

"Lost."

"Ha!"

Sparks smiled. It approached a smirk. The matter was just as he had thought. Sad as the fact might be, his side kick was temporarily cracked.

"Stop standing up there and grinning at me like that! You may think I'm nuts if you want to, but if you've got any idea in your head that I'm a cripple—"

Rutledge prepared to bounce from his resting place and annihilate the smug grin from his tantalizing nurse's face on the spot. Sparks promptly leaned over to prevent him.

Just as Sparks moved a dirk flashed through the open port and struck the wooden bulkhead opposite, hanging there, a slender, menacing thing of quivering steel.

All that Rutledge had seen had been the gleam of a hand in the porthole; a hand too white, too delicate, to belong to any sailor, and across the back of which was traced the outline of a livid scar.

### CHAPTER III.

#### INVESTIGATION.

"ALL here, Mr. Harris?" Captain Hendriks turned inquiringly to the second mate.

"All but Mr. MacDonald on the bridge, Victor at the wheel, and Hans on lookout, sir."

"Good. Mr. Hopper, how about you?"

Hopper, the chief engineer, nodded. He was a short, compactly built man, black hair, inclined to tousel, a two-days' growth of wires of assorted shades sprouting on his chin and its immediate environment, muscular arms, tattooed to an inch of their lives with sundry *subjects d'art* such as the lady with the balloon hips, encircled by an elongated snake, and a fine assortment of



patterns indulged in from Sand Street to the Barbary Coast, and to "Joe the Pricker" in Port Said.

"Bové on watch, Diaz oiling, and Martine firing—rest all here."

"Steward?"

"'Ees, sair. Each properly present, sair."

Hendriks, seated at the head of the long table that ran athwart the forward end of the saloon, regarded the groups of men before him—the deck force, youngsters mostly, although sprinkled with a few older hands, all of them showing traces of the firm, lithe build, fair hair, smiling eyes, and ingenuous features of Scandinavian stock; the "black gang" comprised of the usual motley assortment of Spijs, Dagoes, Armenians, Greeks and what not, pale faced, smooth-musled men, traces of their white skin gleaming through a covering smear of grease and coal dust; the steward's department, immaculately neat, a group of immobile Chinamen standing perfectly at rest, their eyes cast downward, waiting.

"At some time between two o'clock this afternoon and a few moments ago"—thirty-seven pairs of eyes were instantly focused upon Hendriks—"someone on board this boat attacked and struck down Mr. Rutledge."

A murmur of comment, imperceptible as a ripple upon the surface of a wave, ran through the crowd.

"We muster, including myself, exactly forty-eight men. The peculiar nature of the blow on Mr. Rutledge's head precludes the probability that it was either self-inflicted or caused by accidental means.

"Eliminating Mr. Rutledge leaves us a total of forty-seven, every man of whom, including myself, is open to suspicion, and his actions during the period of time that I have mentioned shall be subjected to a rigid examination. I will account to you for my own actions first."

The crowd, swaying in unison with the gentle rolling of the vessel, fused itself into a unit of inanimate silence, hung suspended in a common *rapport* of anticipant attention. Hendriks continued:

"Immediately after dinner I entered the chart room and spent the best part of an

hour in the company of Mr. Rutledge and the second and third officers. Mr. Rutledge and I then walked the bridge deck discussing various subjects until four bells were struck, when he went below. I continued walking the deck, stopping occasionally at the door of the wireless room to chat with Sparks who, to my personal knowledge, was sitting listening-in during the entire period of suspicion.

"Granting, for this preliminary and, of necessity, superficial investigation, the mutual alibis of Sparks and myself, we reduce the number of suspects to forty-five. Of that number it is reasonable to eliminate Mr. Harris, who was on watch on the bridge, and Jorgensen, who was at the wheel.

"I also understand that Mr. MacDonald spent that time in assisting, in his cabin, Davis and Petersen, who are studying navigation and are going up for their tickets at the end of this trip. That leaves the number at forty. Mr. Hopper"—Hendriks turned to the chief engineer—"you can of course account for yourself and your assistants?"

"Yes. Second was on watch. First, third, and the deck engineer all with me in my room playing stud. That makes five accounted for. Then, with the second were Lopez, oiling; McKenzie and Grecco, firing; two coal passers—the wop and Manduras—which makes ten. Oh, yes, and the storekeeper was down below, too. Eleven in all that I can account for."

"Which brings the number down to twenty-nine. Bosun, how about you?"

The bosun, a husky young animal of parts, blushed, hemmed, then rolled into the limelight.

"Well, sir, Harry and me we was in the toolroom working—"

"Harry a sailor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anyone else with you?"

"No, sir."

"That leaves twenty-seven." Hendriks consulted the figures he had been jotting down on a pad. "The carpenter, eight sailors, two oilers, four firemen, two coal passers—"

"I was up for'd, sir," Chips, the car-

penter broke in, "workin' on the anchor windlass. Hanson was there, too, on lookout, he'll—"

"You were there all that time?"

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Then that will account for you and Hanson. I am glad the lookout is able to offer an alibi. The number now stands at twenty-five. Seven sailors—"

"We was all together, all of us in the fo'c'sle, sir," a lanky, serious-faced youth spoke up. "Nils, Frog 'n' Dutch playin' black jack with me, and Shorty there 'n' Curley 'n' Fritz corkin' off in their bunks. Seven of us, yes, sir."

"Did any one of you leave the fo'c'sle for any reason at any time?"

"No, sir!" The protest came from a chorus of agitated voices.

"Eighteen."

Hendriks stared expectantly in the direction of the black gang.

"Fay was shootin' craps with me," one of the oilers volunteered.

"Both of you oilers?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're called 'Red,' aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thus making sixteen—four firemen, and two coal passers. Santos"—Hendriks directly addressed one of the firemen—"how about it?"

Santos swung a slumbrous Latin-American eye in Hendriks's direction and draped his hand with a careless gesture upon his hip.

"Slip."

"You were asleep?"

"Me—slip."

"Santos, him sleep"—a coal passer, an impassioned coal passer, took the floor—"him he sleep, Mendoza him sleep, Ali him sleep. Pedro, Phillipe, me, we make laugh, make sing. Pedro him play guitar *tum, tum, tum, we—*"

"Yes, yes, just a minute, six of you—all together?"

"Sair-tenly."

"In the firemen's fo'c'sle?"

"Sair-ten-ly."

"And that leaves ten—exactly the number of the steward's department. Steward, what have you to say?"

Distrust and ingenerate aversion were concentrated in the glances of the white men now turned upon the ten intruders, the ten little yellow men whose neighbors were edging away, leaving them a group distinct to themselves.

"'Ees, sair." Hong Wing spoke, and lapsed into a contemplative silence.

"Well?"

"Me with first cook, second cook, third cook—all in one room."

"Your room?"

"Cook's room."

"Doing what?"

Hong Wing smiled, then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Make talk, sair."

"And the six mess boys?"

"Four sleep. Two compose elegant letters to their honorable parents, sair."

"All up for'rd?"

"'Ees, sair."

"And that," stated Hendriks, after a brief struggle with the figures on the pad, "gives us the interesting problem of subtracting forty-seven men from forty-seven men and leaving—whom?"

## CHAPTER IV.

### SEARCH.

A STEADILY increasing rumble of ejaculations, oaths, fragmentary sentences, and a sluggish milling around marked the breaking up of the meeting in the saloon.

The men started crowding out by the two doorways, those on the starboard side hushing into inquisitive stillness and smoothing a lane through which Rutledge, followed by Sparks, entered.

Those who were still in the saloon hesitated, eager for further developments, snatching encompassing eyefuls of the star personage in the drama that was rocketing through the void of their monotones.

The star, with becoming modesty, kept his eyes riveted upon a vinegar cruet that clicked time to his advancing with the stately rolling of the vessel.

Sparks swam in the illustrious wake much like a flower maiden at a wedding.

"That will be all, men, for the present. Get back to your quarters." Hendriks's voice, incisive, distinct, fractured the gawking. He dismissed the loiterers with a wave of his hand. "Sit down, Mr. Rutledge."

There remained in the saloon Hendriks, Rutledge, Harris, Sparks, Hopper, and his second and third assistants, Burke and Williams.

"Feeling fit, Mr. Rutledge? No bones broken?"

"No, sir. Head's O. K."

"Some bone!" Sparks muttered in a voice just loud enough to reach its objective, which it did.

"Good. Now then, Mr. Rutledge"—Hendriks hitched forward in his chair—"we want to know."

Rutledge glared defiantly at them, as if daring them in advance to refute his forthcoming statements.

"There is some one on this boat," he said, "who is not down on the articles."

Hendriks's eyes narrowed to a pair of slits through which he glanced sharply at Rutledge. Could he know about— Could anyone know, except himself? Nonsense! It was absurd, in any case. Such things might conceivably happen in romance of the Medieval Ages, but nowadays—impossible!

Rutledge continued talking:

"Some man who has a scar across the back of his hand." The defiance in his look was being replaced by a rather smug air of satisfaction; he felt that he was producing an effect. He was. "I saw it, this scar, as his hand followed the dirk he had thrown at Sparks through the porthole."

A fine assortment of amazed exclamations—manna to the *raconteur*—greeted this announcement. Hendriks distinctly sputtered.

"Start in at the beginning, the very beginning, Mr. Rutledge. None of us here know exactly what has happened as yet; better get it in sequence."

Than which nothing could have pleased Rutledge better. To be twenty-four, to be mate of an eleven thousand-ton ship, to be wise in the ways of the world and its women—the determined blonde in Christiania still rankled, still embittered—was

pleasing enough, but, to be in addition the central figure in what promised to be a scorching mystery of the high seas, one that would be yarned about by coming generations of seamen in their meeting places throughout the ports of the world, that was heaven.

"Well, sir, after I left you at four bells and came below I read for a while in my room, until about three-thirty, then took a walk aft. Just as I got alongside of number three hold a bit of paper fluttered to my feet."

Rutledge indulged in a smug pause. There was no mistaking the quality of it.

He would, thought Harris, who was beginning to be moderately tinged with the pangs of envy. Harris had a distinct leaning toward spotlights, and for being in the center of them.

Rutledge splurged on:

"I picked it up—just out of curiosity, I guess. There was writing on it, a message, the most extraordinary message I've ever read in my life." His manner denoted that there had been many, a veritable harvest of important messages that had come to fruition within his ken. He could feel his audience rising in their seats. "I stood there reading it."

"For one cent—" Sparks pricked the swelling pause.

"Where is this paper, Mr. Rutledge?"

"Gone, sir."

"Gone!"

"It was taken out of my hand after I was struck."

"Do you remember what was written on it?"

Expectation, which had slumped to zero at the announcement that the paper, the most amazing of extraordinary papers, was gone, now rebounded to about three ninety-eight.

"Perfectly, sir," Rutledge stated, and stopped.

"Well?" The query, from the thoroughly aggravated Harris, amounted to an explosion.

"Let me see." Rutledge languidly inspected the tip of Harris's nose. He sensed opposition. "The paper was torn, as if it had been snatched from some one's hand

during a struggle—a severe struggle, Mr. Harris.” He focused his batteries directly upon the potential adversary. “The message as it stood went something like this: ‘I am not dead,’ ‘save me,’ ‘man with the scar,’ ‘mad from the horror,’ and a torn word, ‘—avern,’ a-v-e-r-n. I read it several times, so I remember it.”

“Strike me pink!” prayed Harris.

“I thought it was a joke at first; then I didn’t. I walked for’d to my room, and, you may believe me or not, but I felt some one following me. You know how you get those queer feelings sometimes? Harris here looks as if he’d had them. Well, I looked over my shoulder and saw something that might—I only say ‘might,’ mind you—have been a figure, blurred sort of in the fog. Then, just as I was entering the passageway, at the very instant when my foot was lifted over the coaming—”

“Yes?”

“At that very instant, Mr. Harris,, I felt a hand clutching at the back of my shirt.”

Harris beamed benignantly upon him.

“How long did it take you to make your room, Mr. Rutledge? It must have been a record.”

Rutledge gave him a look.

“I turned about instantly,” he said severely. “Gentlemen, there was no one there.”

Rutledge included everyone in a dramatic glance—that is, it was intended to be dramatic—highly. As a matter of fact, it only gave his listeners the impression that he had just eaten something disagreeable.

“Fiddlesticks!”

“I assure you, Mr. Harris, that there was no one there—nothing—nothing but fog.”

“Well, you could see at least six feet into it couldn’t you, Mr. Rutledge?”

“Ten, Mr. Harris, easily ten. And I again state that for the distance of those ten feet the deck was clear.”

“Marvelous!”

“Mr. Rutledge”—Hendriks hastened to stem the rising conflict—“just what did you do then?”

“I went to my room, sir, sat down on my bunk, and started puzzling over the

message. I had that funny feeling again”—he glared at Harris, who smiled and nodded understandingly, maddeningly so—“that feeling that some one was near me whom I couldn’t see.”

“Ghosts.”

“No! Not ghosts—a person.”

“Oh—not ghosts.”

“A person who was going to attack me.

I can’t explain it—can’t begin even to explain it—but I was as certain as I am of the fact that I’m sitting here, that I was in danger. Just then some one hit me on the head.”

Harris smirked complacently. “Another funny feeling,” he said.

“You wouldn’t have thought it so damn funny, Mr. Harris, if it had been your head—”

“Oh, it would have killed me, Mr. Rutledge. My skull is considerably thinner—”

“Gentlemen! Hendriks pounded on the table. “Continue, Mr. Rutledge.”

Rutledge retrenched. “Of course I don’t remember what happened from then on until I opened my eyes and heard Sparks here yelling his head off in my ears—”

“Yelling? My voice was soothing—”

“Yelling his head off in my ears,” Rutledge insisted, “fit to bust them.” Having established the point, he wound up: “Just after that this here dirk was slung at Sparks and that’s all I know.”

It was enough. Plenty. They seized upon the dirk and examined it; passed it from hand to hand. It seemed a materialistic clinching of Rutledge’s startling statements; it authenticated them.

It was a finely tempered bit of steel, the handle of bleached bone chased with some figures that were Oriental in design. It traveled, impressively, the round of the table and stopped at Hendriks, who pocketed it. He looked toward Sparks.

“Well, youngster, what about this dirk, this escape of yours? Got any idea of what’s at the bottom of all this mystery?”

Sparks had. A very definite, a very good idea. He was a strangely materialistic soul, in the manner of one whose ideals, whose illusions have been nipped in the pale flush of their earliest blooming. At the age of eight his Santa Claus had been a dreary

mockery of bitter city snows; romance, for him, had been still-born in the vice of unconscious cynicism.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"What?"

"Brass tacks."

"What?"

"I said 'brass tacks,' sir, speakin' symbol-wise. There's a reason for this—for everything; some good, cold, solid, hard fact. Take Pete here. He connects up with one of them, like say ten or twelve inches of lead pipe 'n' fades out of the picture; take that there dirk, a mitt slung it and it stuck in the bulkhead. Whose mitt? Easier to say whose mitt it ain't. Ever see any mitt aboard this *bateau* with a scar on it?"

A mute wagging of heads testified to the fact that no one ever had. "No. That means one thing—a stowaway. One more thing: That's a Chink knife, which might mean nuthin' or which might mean—much." He scowled darkly, and youthfully, in the general direction of the galley.

"The whole thing looks like the Chinks to me, Sparks. Sure that hand you saw wasn't yellow, Mr. Rutledge?"

"I only caught a glimpse of it, sir. It was gone like a flash; then the fog—" Rutledge wove his impression of the confusingness of the fog with a vague gesturing of his fingers. Harris chose to take the movement personally, and slipped him the high sign—planting one thumb in an ear and wabbling his hand back and forth.

"Of course. Now then, gentlemen"—Hendriks tapped curtly upon the table—"this is the situation that we have to face: First, I agree with Sparks that there is a stowaway on board. Secondly, this man is guarding some secret, some secret to which that torn slip of paper is the clew. Thirdly, he is a man who is ready to commit murder rather than have that secret leak out.

"I am convinced that he intended to kill Mr. Rutledge and, later, Sparks as well. Finally—and let this get no further than among ourselves—you know what sort of a hell it would raise aft—now that all of us are obviously going to do our best to unearth this mystery, for in spite of the insistence of our young friend, I feel that the

real point has not been touched upon as yet. In other words, that there *is* a mystery, I do not believe"—he leaned far over the table toward them, his voice sinking to a confidential whisper—"that any one of us is safe from attack!"

The effect produced by the statement was compelling, to say the least. Instinctively, each one pictured himself as the recipient of a blow on the head that would come to him out of the dark.

"I believe," Hendriks went on, "that most of you have revolvers of different sorts. I've heard enough of them popping on the passage out. Well, when you leave here, arm yourselves and stay armed day and night until we clear this mess up. It's only"—he sought to apologize for the dip into melodrama—"common sense. Remember that there are two weeks still before us."

Hong Wing entered.

There was an immediate silence; animation itself seemed suspended, smothered. Two bells were struck on the bridge; faintly, from the bell by the booby hatch forward, came the muffled sound of two deeper, answering tones; the clock in the saloon struck twice—sharp, staccato notes.

"Well?" Hendriks eyed Hong Wing.

"Supper, sair—the table?"

Hong Wing fluttered an encompassing desire for the possession of the table.

"Later."

"'Ees, sair."

His eyes flickering an uncertain moment across the faces staring so truculently, so suspiciously at him, Hong Wing sighed delicately, turned, and left the saloon.

"I'd put *him* in irons, sir!" Rutledge frowned at Hendriks.

"No, nothing like that yet. We can't afford to. Be different if we were ashore. Two weeks is a long time, a very long time. No, we cannot afford to make any mistakes. This thing may be greater than just a one-man proposition."

Rutledge hoped, personally, that it would be; the bigger the better, the more exciting. What a heaven-sent break in the monotony of the long trip. And so far he held the leading rôle. He meant to keep it.

"You mean, sir"—eagerly—"that there

may be more than just this one man with the scarred hand in on it?"

"There is no telling how many are in on it, Mr. Rutledge. If it is a group, we cannot afford to antagonize any one who may be innocent, and upon whose assistance and loyalty we might have to count upon later."

If anyone else than Hendriks had made that statement, Harris would have snorted. He could, however, hardly snort at the captain. After all, one doesn't. He curbed himself down to a politely incredulous stare.

"Surely, sir," he said, "you don't imagine mutiny in these days?"

"I imagine everything, Mr. Harris. The greatest crimes have been perpetrated through lack of nothing else than proper vision, imagination, on the part of their victims."

Harris murmured with beautiful distinctness that in his private opinion Rutledge had plenty of the latter commodity.

"The success of any crime," Hendriks embroidered further, "depends largely upon its elements of unexpectedness. Most crimes have their forewarnings, forewarnings so vague in the majority of cases that they pass unperceived; so seemingly absurd in other cases that they are ignored. No, Mr. Harris, I am not a bit unwilling to imagine a motive of mutiny among the list of possible explanations for this mystery."

Harris momentarily effaced himself into the middle distance. Sparks promptly took the field. The reiteration of the word "mystery" jarred.

"That piece of paper with the yell for help on it is the key to your—riddle, sir. No mystery about a piece of paper. You can," he added clinchingly, "feel paper."

"Hark to our rising young realist," breathed Harris. "Or should I say 'risen'?"

"You should say what you like, Mr. Harris, but you can take it from me that realism, risen or unrisen, is the dope."

Harris "clucked."

Hendriks clamped down upon the promising tiff. "Give me those sentences again, Mr. Rutledge." He nodded to Rutledge to begin, and prepared to take notes on the pad.

"The man with the scar, 'save me'"—Rutledge gave each tid-bit its proper

emotional emphasis—"I am not dead," "mad from this horror," and "—avert," that was the last word, sir—all by itself on the last line. I thought it might be 'cavern,' or 'tavern.'"

"I am not dead"—I wonder!"

Hendriks kept his eyes lowered to the pad lying on the table in front of him. His words, barely muttered, had cut the stillness of the saloon with disturbing clearness. He felt that the eyes of each man therein were fixed upon him curiously. He looked up.

"What was that, Mr. Rutledge? 'Cavern'—'tavern,' you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hardly make sense, would it?"

"No, sir." Rutledge dropped his reply flatly.

"Last line, wasn't it, Pete?" Sparks broke in.

"Yes; all by itself."

"Then why not the guy's name? The end of it, at least."

It was unanimously agreed that "—avert" was part of the writer's name. The idea opened up a string of further consonants for Rutledge to tack on; last names were famous for their lack of sense.

"Well, gentlemen"—Hendriks put the pad in his pocket—"there is nothing to be gained by sitting here any longer. The simplest and most obvious things to do are to search the ship, catch this stowaway, and find out what it's all about."

"Mr. Hopper, please examine the engine room and the bunks. Mr. Rutledge, examine the holds, and Mr. Harris the quarters and the deck. Take such men as you need to help you." He pressed a bell button at the end of a swinging cord suspended from the overhead. "Report to me in my room as each one of you completes his search. Do not overlook my advice about arming yourselves, and if it should be necessary"—Hong Wing entered the saloon, and Hendriks stared directly at him as he completed the sentence—"do not hesitate to shoot. Steward!"

"Sair?" The word hissed ingratiatingly from between motionless lips.

"You can have the table set for mess. We will have it in one hour."

Three quarters of an hour later all search parties had reported to Hendriks.

There was no one to be found.

## CHAPTER V.

### FLICKERING LIGHTS.

SUPPER that evening was a brilliant affair—socially. There was something to talk about, and every one talked, and ate, at the same time. Woman, her virtues, her bewilderments, her bedevilments, took a back seat. "Who is the man with the scarred hand?" was the burning, the all-absorbing topic of the moment. For the first time on record the food was swallowed without comment—derogatory comment.

Sparks, with pad, pencil, and profuse diagrams—he had drawn a hasty plan of the deck—was attempting to prove to his opinionative, talkative, and inattentive messmates the futility of the search that had just been conducted.

The conditions had been one hundred per cent in favor of the fugitive. The fog for one thing; the small number of pursuers for another. He pointed out several places he personally would have taken advantage of under similar circumstances. Had Mr. Harris examined the hawse pipes? Mr. Harris had not. Had Mr. Harris leaned over the bow and looked for the fugitive to be seated athwart a fluke of one of the anchors themselves? Again Mr. Harris had not. Had Mr. Harris actually climbed the masts, not alone as far as the crosstrees, but to a point from where the tops themselves could be seen? A man, shrouded in fog, could easily—Mr. Harris really had no idea how easily—remain concealed aloft until the search—

Harris, by then bordering upon a fine state of apoplexy, burst forth in a torrent of invectives against all newfangled contraptions of the sea—wireless, and its operators particularly. Hendriks stopped the pretty brangle by calling the mess boy.

"Boy," he said, "turn on the lights."

The saloon was lighted by four clusters set in the overhead. A slight flickering of the filaments marked the whirling of the

commutator across the brushes of the ship's dynamo. For an instant talk was suspended as each man glanced up at the lights, an involuntary habit probably handed down from prehistoric ages when bright things were marvels to gaze at. The different discussions—monologues rather—then broke out again with renewed vigor.

"What I don't see"—Harris forced his voice a peg higher up, a peg high enough to command a momentary attention from all of them—"about this here mutiny theory is, where's your motive?"

He would have liked to have paused a second for emphasis. He realized that to do so would be to be lost. There were too many fermenting opinions, waiting to froth emotionally into the first gap of silence. He hastened on.

"There's nothing of immense value on board like jewels, or gold or that—just a general cargo of steel rails, machinery, and bulky stuff. Of course, it's valuable as a cargo; shouldn't wonder if the whole lot represented well over a million dollars, but you can't walk into a pawn shop with a couple of steel rails over your shoulder and say, 'how much on this?' and this isn't the sort of a ship that could be run into a small cove or up a creek, is it now?" He had to breathe. "Now I—"

The question was fatal. Every one plunged headlong into the fractional gap between the "nows." Hendriks achieved the conquering peg.

"Mutiny, Mr. Harris, is only a possibility, not a probability." Hendriks gave a precautionary glance to assure himself that the mess boy had left the saloon. "As for the unwieldiness of the cargo, I should imagine that that would have very little to do with the matter. It would be the ship herself that they would want. With her tonnage at their disposal one successful landing of, say whisky, for instance, would yield them riches beyond the dreams of a La Fitte.

"But no. The solution, as Sparks says, lies in that statement on that slip of paper. 'I am not dead.' It is as absurd and as unbelievable in its way as this theory of mutiny, but I am convinced that it holds the true solution to our problem. I am go-

ing to do a peculiar, an exceptional thing." He lowered his voice. "There is one place on board this ship that still remains to be searched."

As if to emphasize the remark, the lights of the saloon suddenly dimmed to a semi-glow. Some extra load had just been thrown upon the dynamo. Slowly the lights returned to a brilliancy just below normal.

"Say!" Sparks announced in no uncertain tone of voice, "some guy's just started my set!"

The generator of the wireless transmitter, being fed directly from the ship's dynamo, placed a heavy load upon the dynamo whenever the set was started up, a load that took the governor a moment to counteract.

"He's sending!" Sparks exclaimed in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

They sat gazing stupidly up at the lights, fascinated into a momentary inaction. With every contact of the transmitting key making its dots and dashes the load on the dynamo was increased during the period of contact, and, in consequence, the lights in the saloon were dimmed during the same period, making it possible for anyone to read whatever message was being sent out by means of the dots and dashes clearly marked by the lights.

Sparks had grabbed his pencil and pad and was copying, his eyes turned toward one of the flickering clusters. They crowded around him, leaned over him, staring at the letters appearing on the paper as he wrote.

"It's hash—perfectly lucid, plain hash!" Harris informed them.

"Shut up!" Rutledge layed a restraining hand on Harris's arm. "Don't bother him."

The lights, to Sparks, flashed - - - . . . and continued in a rapid succession of blinks unintelligible to a layman. The letters on the pad strung out into the following cipher:

onnotionposirtythinenityforxsihnooreonntyseve  
eensixtstwersecouotwntyseveuetredspneniacka  
ttaceon4 - - - - - onnotionposirtythinenity  
forxsi—

"He's repeating," Sparks stated.

"Is that thing a word?" asked Harris.

"It's cipher."

Sparks tore the message from the pad and handed it to Hendriks.

"Here, sir, you'd best keep this. C'mon, fellers—let's go!"

The China Queen had her house amidships arranged in this fashion:

Take the saloon as a starting point, a large, rectangular room running athwart the ship. In its forward end were eight ports looking out upon the forward part of the main deck. In its starboard and port ends were two doors apiece leading, each one, into an officer's cabin. From each one of these four cabins there was no means of egress except by the door opening into the saloon.

In the saloon's after-end were two doors opening into a passage that ran completely athwart the house and at either end of which was a door, flanked on the outside by a steel door, opening directly upon the main deck.

In one side of the passage opposite from the saloon were three doors, one opening into the pantry, one into the officers' bathroom, and one into the steward's cabin. A stairway led from this passage to the passage directly above it on the bridge deck.

This upper passage had a door at either end opening directly on deck. Two doors in its forward side led respectively into the captain's quarters and the spare room, neither of which had any exit onto the deck.

Two doors in its after side opened into the wireless operating room and bunk room, and into the captain's bathroom. The wireless operating room possessed a door of its own that opened directly upon the bridge deck.

Every one followed Sparks. They ran from the saloon and up the stairs to the upper passage. Sparks sprang for the door of the wireless room. It was locked.

"On deck!" Every one had the idea at once. They assailed the two doors at either end of the passage. Both were locked. With an exceptionally fine assortment of oaths they streamed again down the stairs and for the two doors of the lower passage leading onto the main deck. They also were locked.



"Steward!"

The cry was universal. No voice answered them. No gliding figure appeared before them. They assaulted the pantry.

Lying on the deck of the pantry were three figures—Hong Wing, the saloon mess boy, and the pantryman. Blood flowed from the noses of the latter two. They were moaning energetically.

Hong Wing lay strangely silent. An expression that might have passed as a satirical smile rested lightly upon his lips.

From above came the noise of crashings.

"They're destroying the set," Sparks informed the others in a voice that rivaled ranges achieved by wireless. "Your hear that? They're destroying the set!"

In a body they started back for the door of the wireless room—the most breakable door of the lot.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NUMBER THREE HOLD AND—WHY?

THE racket in the wireless room stopped abruptly. The only sound amidships came from the successive blows of Rutledge's shoulder as he hurled his hundred and eighty odd pounds of bone and muscle against the locked door.

"What a very strong door." Harris aloofly surveyed Rutledge's efforts. "You'll have to put some strength into it, Mr. Rutledge. Now I should suggest—"

Before Harris could offer any illuminating suggestions on the subject of battering in locked doors the door on the starboard end of the passage was yanked violently open from the deck side and a sailor tumbled in.

He looked for a moment, pop-eyed, at the *tableau vivant*, composed of Hendriks, pale, tense, and holding a revolver; Rutledge, poised for another smashing blow, the light from the overhead splotching down upon the whipcord muscles of his neck and shoulders; Harris, superbly detached, very *deus ex machina* about the whole affair; Sparks, half crouched for a spring. Then he spoke his little piece:

"Mr. MacDonald would like to know what is happening, sir. He sent me—"

Four figures hurtled past the sailor and out onto the deck. He felt all the sensations of having been intimately mixed up with a typhoon. He followed them, irresistibly sucked along in the distinct wake they created, as they scurried around the house to the port side, and came to a four bells and a jingle stop before the deck door of the wireless room.

The door was open and it was dark inside.

Sparks drew an additional breath, stepped in, and felt for the light switch. It was still there. He clicked it. A wall bracket lighted.

"Yee! Yumped up yimminy, stick it in your eyebrow dot bane some mess!" This effusion being from the sailor who lapsed, in his amazement, into the dialect of his birth.

Hendriks turned to him.

"Report to Mr. MacDonald that there—that there has been an accident," he said quietly. "Tell him under no circumstances to leave the bridge. I will go up there presently."

"Yes, sir."

Round-eyed—and there is nothing more round-eyed in the world than an amazed Swede—the sailor disappeared up the ladder. At the top of it the vague form of MacDonald could be seen peering anxiously down—a darker blot against the blackness of the sky.

The fog had lifted, and a star or two struggled fitfully for recognition. It was the time of the new moon and the slender paring had already set below the western rim.

"Is there much damage, Sparks?" inquired Hendriks.

"Yes, sir. Tell you better in a few minutes."

"Look it over, then wait for me in my room. Mr. Rutledge, go ask Mr. Hopper to come to my room and then wait for me there yourself."

"Yes, sir."

Rutledge started below.

"Mr. Harris, go down and see what you can do about the steward and those two boys. After that put on a deck watch of four men. Station them in places where

they will be within easy call of each other. They are to investigate immediately any suspicious actions on the part of anybody.

"Explain as little to them as you can. I don't want the men alarmed any more than they are now. However, if any of the men object or are inclined to refuse the extra work, say that I order it for the safety of the vessel."

Harris started. Coming from the captain, the phrase "for the safety of the vessel" carried a distinct and definite thrill. It placed the whole affair on a higher plane. He rather felt, in carrying that phrase about with him, and the authority to use it, as though he were carrying the Pope's ring; a Nuncio with plenipotentiary powers. He had a decided appetency for things that were regal. He certainly hoped that the men would show an inclination to refuse. He went below, with a flair.

Hendriks mounted to the bridge. MacDonald stood waiting for him at the head of the ladder. The man at the wheel, in the wheelhouse, stared stolidly at the card.

"Come over here, Mr. MacDonald."

"Yes, sir."

They moved to the port end of the bridge.

"Something further has happened, sir?"

"Yes. I want to find out what you know about it. Have you noticed anything unusual from the bridge during the past half hour?"

"That infernal racket a few minutes ago—"

"But before then?"

"Why no, sir. It's so pitch black tonight you can't see the deck very well. I did hear Sparks getting off a message. Then there was that pounding down in the shack. Sounded like he was out to bust the whole works to pieces."

"Which end of the bridge were you when the racket commenced?"

"Starb'd, sir."

"Then you couldn't look down at the door of the shack."

"No, sir. But after it had been going on for a moment—the racket—I crossed to this end and called down. As there wasn't any answer I blew my whistle for the sailor on watch to come up and investigate."

"Was the noise still going on?"

"It had just stopped, sir. Saw Sparks come out and start down the ladder for the main deck."

"You saw the man come out of that door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could you see what he looked like?"

"Sparks?"

"It was some one else—the man we're after."

"The one who struck Mr. Rutledge?"

"Yes."

"Good Lord—if I'd only known! It was so dark. I was sure it was Sparks. I called him. Asked him what the racket was about. He just kept on going, never stopped. The sailor had come up by then, so I sent him to find out about it."

"You couldn't see which way the man went?"

"It was so dark, sir—"

"Of course." Hendriks paused. When he spoke again, his manner was strained—significant. "Mr. MacDonald, I am going to ask you to continue Mr. Rutledge's watch until eight and then keep right on with your own. I have work, very serious work, for Mr. Rutledge below. There is no time for lengthy explanations to you now. They will come later."

"Yes, sir."

"Take this." Hendriks handed MacDonald a revolver. "It is loaded. I know you have none of your own. I can tell you nothing definite, give you no warning, no hint as to what to expect or from what quarter to look for it. I do know, however, that all of us are in very grave danger. Exercise the greatest caution, the greatest vigilance—and under no circumstances whatsoever leave this bridge!"

MacDonald, thoroughly impressed, took the revolver from Hendriks and pocketed it.

"One more thing, Mr. MacDonald. If you sight a ship call me immediately." He hesitated the barest fraction of a moment. "If I am not to be found in my room, the man will locate me in number three hold."

"In number three hold—yes, sir."

Hendriks went below. MacDonald, his hand fingering the gun in his pocket, walked toward the door of the wheelhouse.

He glanced at the man at the wheel—a sturdy, honest-eyed youngster, the light from the binnacle casting queer, upward glows upon his face much, MacDonald thought, like footlights on the faces of actors in a play. That was it exactly. The whole thing was like a play, with the difference that he knew the actors in it, that he was an actor in it himself. Then just what did the old man want down in number three hold, and—why?

Leaning on the dodger, he stood staring out into the distant places of the night.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A BOX MARKED "BROKEN MACHINERY."

RUTLEDGE and Sparks were seated with Hendriks in his cabin. The orderly stillness of the ship, the confident tremor of vibration from her engines—assurance of stability and power—her steady rise and fall at each successive swell, the thorough naturalness of their surroundings, all combined to make each one of the three doubt that the events of which they were now the center were real.

"Sparks"—Hendriks spoke at last—"did you find out what's the damage to the set?"

"Ruined, sir—absolutely ruined."

"Everything?"

"Not everything, no, sir. He's no madman, that guy. He hadn't time to smash everything. He's one clever devil. Knows just what can't be replaced or substituted. Smashed every condenser, including the spares; burned out the motor fields; burned out the tuner; smashed the audion, and pocketed every bit of crystal in sight. If the ship was sinking I couldn't let out a yelp."

"What about the auxiliary?"

"Spark coil smashed to bits—batteries emptied—ruined—ruined—"

Even Rutledge was moved by this tragic recital to a burst of sympathy—a wild burst for him.

"Hard luck, kid," he growled.

"It's the devil," Sparks answered gloomily.

"It is the devil!"

Hendriks spoke with extraordinary conviction. They looked at him.

"There are things about this business that aren't natural, that aren't"—his voice struck a distinctly hollow note—"human." He paused, to let his meaning sink in.

It didn't. There had been nothing even faintly approaching the phantasmal in the solid thump that Rutledge had received on the back of his head. Sparks also failed to remember any transparencies in the dirk that had been slung at him.

Hendriks continued into their plainly incredulous faces: "Things, I say, that aren't human. Things we will talk about when Mr. Hopper gets here." He felt himself heading against strong currents of skepticism. He altered his course. "Mr. Rutledge, what has Mr. Harris to say about the steward?"

"He's waiting outside with him, sir. Wants you to question him. Says it's queer."

"What is queer?"

"About the steward and those two boys, sir."

Hendriks crossed to the door and opened it.

"Come in!"

Harris, followed by Hong Wing, came into the cabin.

"Shut that door, steward."

"'Ees, sir."

"Now, then, Mr. Harris, what about it?"

Harris made a gesture almost Oriental in its delicacy and expressiveness.

"You know how hard it is to get anything out of them, sir." Harris shot a truculent look at Hong Wing. "They leave it up to you to explain things, to put words into their mouths, rather than explaining anything themselves—like a Christian."

"Steward, speak up!"

"No know, sir."

"You see?" Harris spread out his hands.

"What happened to you, steward?"

"Hit, sir."

"Some one hit you?"

"'Ees, sir. Allee samee honorable mate, sir."

"Never mind the honorable mate. Who hit you?"

"Him hit. Me no know."

"Who hit? Who's 'him'?"

"No know."

"The three of you were together, weren't you? You and those two boys?"

"'Ees, sair."

"Well?"

"Sair?"

"One of you must have seen it happen. The three of you couldn't just have been knocked down like that without some knowledge of the man who did it. Stop lying to me!"

Hong Wing, with a superb upward casting of the eyes, implored the Celestials to witness this gross injustice. He then assumed a charming expression, intending to impress his questioner that he was the very soul of truth, honor, and the seven illustrious virtues. Harris made a mental note of it.

"Him put lights out, sair, first place." Hong Wing threw them this sop, candor beaming, radiating from his whole face.

"He struck you in the dark?"

"'Ees, sair."

"But didn't you defend yourself? Couldn't you hold him? Couldn't you do something?"

"Him very proper quick, sair. Me know nothing."

Hendriks riveted him with his eye.

"Hong Wing, answer me this. *"Who turned those lights on again?"* They were on when we found you."

Hendriks leaned back in his chair. His whole attitude expressed a complacent "Answers me that now, if you can." Hong Wing certainly could. He answered immediately, as if the answer were obvious and the question itself quite stupidly absurd.

"Me no know, sair."

"You expect me to believe this?"

Hong Wing strove to intimate with his eyes that he did.

"Me no know, sair."

Hendriks rose in his wrath.

"Go below!" he yelled. "Get out!"

And for the first time during the interview Hong Wing sincerely smiled.

"Mr. Harris, continue on deck watch below."

"Yes, sir—you see I, well, I told you."

After Harris and Hong Wing had left the cabin, Hendriks stormed to Rutledge.

"The only thing that makes me think I may be wrong, the only defensible point to his whole story is the fact that all the doors below were fastened from the outside. I don't trust him, any of them—don't like them. I hate them for their smugness, for their everlasting air of reserve, as if they had the whole world tucked up their sleeve and could pull it out of a silk hat for you. They are masked, always masked, and yet, what can I do?"

"Put them in irons, sir!" Rutledge took a hack at this Gordian knot. He had a *penchant* for irons, and as for having the steward clapped into them, that was fast becoming an *idée fixe*.

"Why? On what grounds? If I could get something definite, something that pointed to him personally, I wouldn't hesitate a minute. But just because we think, just because we want to think that a Chinaman is at the bottom of it— Don't you see how it is? How my hands are tied? We aren't on a 'windbag' in the eighties you know. A fine yarn he'd make of it to the first consul he ran into, clapped into irons by his skipper for—for nothing."

Hopper entered. The three turned to him. He stood by the closed door, his back resting against it, looking down at them.

"Well," he said, "things are hot, captain, yes, sir, getting pretty hot."

"You mean aft?"

"I do, and down below. You see, the men don't know what's up, any more than we do, so they're imagining everything. They've worked themselves up into a state of doing anything, too. That blessed second mate of yours has been shooting off a lot of 'safety of the vessel' stuff at the deck force. They expect us to roll over and sink any minute. By the time the rumors stop flying around they'll believe we are sunk."

"Bad!"

"I'll say it is. You know what sheep the men are. Led by the strongest personality, whether right or wrong, into all sorts of devilments or heroics. Led, sometimes, just by the loudest voice."

"What is their attitude toward us?" asked Hendriks.

"Waiting. They trust us, of course; they've got to, poor devils! But they expect something, some definite statement or revelation. My gang are the hardest to handle. They've their superstitions, their dreads, dreads we have no conception of, especially the Spaniards. I honestly believe they're afraid of ghosts.

"I tell you seriously that it is terror, sheer terror, that we've got to fight against with the men. If it ever breaks loose among them they'd either stop work completely and lie down and shiver, or else start knifing each other just as a relief from the tension of it. Why, look here. Here's one instance. Diaz, one of my coal passers, is spreading some yarn even now about having seen a mysterious figure dressed in white. He called it a shroud. All nonsense, excitable imaginings, of course—"

"I'm not so sure. No, sir! I'm not so sure."

They stared at Hendriks, dumfounded. The dread, the most tormenting fear of all fears at sea, crept insidiously upon them—the fear that this man, the controller and absolute arbiter of their fates, their very lives, should be going insane. It had happened before to other men, men just as competent and apparently sane as Hendriks. Each one of them recalled yarns he had listened to from other sailors, yarns that had ended in tragedy, in horrible disasters—

"What do you mean, sir? Don't you think we ought to know?"

Rutledge looked evenly at Hendriks, sought to find in the troubled eyes of the man opposite him some definite denial of the fear that was growing upon all of them.

"I mean, Mr. Rutledge, just this." Hendriks paused, trying to collect the proper words with which to express this unbelievable conviction that had taken root in him. "There is a person on this boat who is not dead!"

They stared at him hopelessly.

"I refer to the phrase on that slip of paper, the phrase that reads, 'I am not dead.' There is only one thing on board this vessel to which that can refer. I am

going to tell you what that thing is. The time has come to speak."

His listeners breathed more easily.

"In spite of certain promises of silence, a silence I should naturally have preserved in any case, I must take you into my confidence. Do you remember, Mr. Rutledge, the night before we cleared from San Francisco? You were on watch at the time."

"Yes, sir. There was nothing unusual that happened."

"You remember, it was shortly after two bells, some stevedores coming aboard with an extra piece of cargo?"

"Yes, sir. You were with them yourself. You explained it had been shipped at the last minute."

"And I told you not to bother? I would personally see it placed in number three hold?"

"Yes, sir. You sent me ashore on some errand."

"Exactly. Well, gentlemen, it is that box that we are now going to investigate, to open up." He paused a moment. When he spoke again his voice had sunk to the suggestion of a whisper. "That box is marked 'Broken Machinery.'"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HENDRIKS TALKS.

AN uncomfortable silence settled down upon Hendriks's three listeners, a silence pregnant with shadowed wonders, possibilities, formless doubts. Why wasn't the old man more explicit? Why didn't he come out with whatever he had to say in plain, straightforward fashion, instead of hinting at vagaries, talking in uncertain suggestions?

The answer, obviously, was that whatever it was that he had to confess was neither plain nor straightforward. Each one of them instinctively recoiled from attributing any act of a shady or an underhanded nature to Hendriks. Such a thing would be too foreign to his character as they knew it, and one gets to know a man's character exhaustively well at sea.

But did they know it?

They waited for him to speak. A suspi-

cion of what was passing in their minds must have come to Hendriks. They were too ingenuous, too kind-hearted and simple-natured not to have their faces reveal pretty clearly their thoughts.

He hastened to correct them.

"There was nothing wrong about it, nothing shady in the transaction." He noted a distinct reaction of relief. "The manner of doing the business was a little out of the ordinary, a bit mysterious; no more so, I imagine, than in all such cases. I have never handled one before myself.

"Taken as it stands, stripped of all the peculiar circumstances that have recently happened aboard here, the matter is absurdly simple. There's nothing to it at all. But in the light of what has happened, what is happening, it becomes enormous, grotesque, a thing out of a dream-book, a dream-book dealing in unpleasant dreams, nightmares. You see"—he leaned closer to them—"the box contains a coffin, and the coffin contains a corpse—as I have been led to believe."

"The men must never know that!" Rutledge looked from one to the other for confirmation. "They'd want it chucked over the side—blame all the things that are happening to it. There'd be the very devil of a row."

Hendriks's implication still failed to strike them.

"But, don't you see," he said, "that's just the point. It is at the bottom of it—of everything. Gentlemen, *that corpse isn't dead!*"

Hopper recovered first.

"Well, yank him out and let's have a look at him." Hopper glanced at the others. "Why not?"

"There are several reasons, Mr. Hopper, that make it difficult, that would certainly make it impossible but for to-day's occurrences."

"Who's he, the dead one, do you know?" Hopper asked.

"Yes. He is a certain Chinaman of great importance and rank. You will see the difficulty I am in—"

"He's the man with the scarred hand!"

Rutledge asserted with conviction.

"Couldn't be, Pete," Sparks said.

"More like he's some guy the scarred mitt's keepin' as a prisoner. Otherwise, why the call for help on that piece of paper?"

"That is reasonable," Hendriks conceded. "I will tell you all I know about it, all that White told me up at the office the afternoon I went to get the papers. He seemed particularly impressed about the whole things. White did his best to make me feel impressed about it, too. He didn't. It seemed quite ordinary.

"Besides, I had other things to attend to, small, personal things, tremendously important to me of course, such as all of us have to rush around doing the last minutes before departure. There was the worry about stores closing before I could get to them, and all that. The sum of the whole matter to me was just one dead Chinaman in a box which was to be delivered at Hongkong.

"Even though I was half thinking of other things while White talked the details of what he said are quite clear to me now. He must have been more impressive than I realized at the time. As I say, this man isn't an ordinary Chinaman, a plain John Chink, not by any means. He's some high muck-a-muck in one of their secret societies, tongs, or whatever they are.

"White even hinted a bit at matters of a political nature, high politics in China; what the Germans speak about in hushed voices as *realpolitik*s. White wasn't very definite as to that, the political aspect of it, but he did emphasize the importance of handling and taking care of the box with extreme care; gave me a tremendous rigmarole about the reverence of the Chinese for their dead.

"Lord knows where he picked his knowledge up! I couldn't see what he was driving at. I know I asked him point blank if he imagined for a single instant that I'd be such a fool as to tamper with the box. He assured me that wasn't his point at all. If I had seriously imagined that it had been his point I'd have thrown the job up in his face on the spot and told him to get another skipper. Those office people ashore get entirely too cocky sometimes. I'm perpetually being astonished at their ignorance, their silly bumbledom.

"He said his point was just this: That the consigners had paid a large sum entirely of their own accord, 'way and above the price the owners had asked, just to make sure that the greatest, the most extreme care would be exercised in all handling and stowing of the box.

"I know enough about Mongolians myself to realize that to open the coffin and examine the corpse would be about the last word, the last Chinese word, in desecration. Our lives wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel if the *tong*, or whatever it is, found out about it. They'd snap us off like that, to avenge the stain on their honor.

"As I say, all that part of it didn't bother me then. Why should it have? Why on earth should I—should any one—want to go prying about a coffin? The idea is distasteful under any circumstances. I did insist, however, on the fact that it was a coffin being concealed.

"You know how superstitious most crews are about carrying dead ones aboard, all the absurd fancies and troubles that come from it when the fact is known. That is why I had the outer box marked 'Broken Machinery,' and saw to the stowing of it myself. They must have paid the owners a whopping price from all the hammering on me that White did about it. If we do open it up I'm liable to be flayed at both ends. Of course I'm going to. There isn't any other reasonable way out of it, is there? Of course, the full responsibility for doing it will rest with me."

"There's nothing else to do. No, sir, there's nothing else to do," Rutledge said. "There's deviltry at the bottom of it, things the owners know nothing at all about. If this Chink's so all-blamed important why did they ship him on a tramp like us, and not on one of the flash liners? What's the reason for that?"

"There is no reason for anything that I can see, Mr. Rutledge, no reason at all. All we have to go by is the slip of paper you lost, the dirk—there was something else—"

"That hand I saw, sir, with the scar?"

"Yes, but not that— Something— Of course! Here, Sparks, take this and see what you can make out of it while we are

down below." He handed Sparks the paper with the cipher message on it that had been copied from the blinking lights. "Stay here in this room. While you're working on it you'd better lock the door and draw the curtains across the ports. Got a gun?"

"No, sir."

"I've given mine to Mr. MacDonald. Well, you won't need one with the door locked." He stood up. "Now then, Mr. Rutledge, you and Mr. Hopper and I will go down into number three hold and—do what we have to do."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BOX IS OPENED.

"**T**HAT," Hendriks stated, "is the box."

He played the light from his electric torch over the side facing them. Rutledge and Hopper stared at the ordinary-enough-looking packing case. The intensity of Rutledge's convictions about its "innards" transformed its rough boarding of pine into something inexplicably mysterious, a bit terrifying to him.

"Look out below!"

Harris's voice, feeble at best, came down to them, standing there between decks, as if from immense distances; as something related to the stars, now brilliantly studding the rectangular patch of black velvet sky framed by the open hatch above; as something more remote and less real than the cargo light cluster he was lowering away to them from above—a cluster resembling three large, vivacious fireflies, twirling and descending down upon them to disperse the crowding darknesses that were retreating so sullenly to vague recesses of the hold before its approach.

"Make fast above!" Hendriks called, as the lights reached a spot favorable to their operations.

"All fast, sir." Harris's voice lost itself in immeasurable silences.

"Now, then, we can see to work," said Hendriks.

"Hadn't we best look around first, sir?" Rutledge asked, glancing at the obscure places, at the shadows and the things that

lurked in them, outside the dazzling circle of the light.

"Yes, perhaps we better had."

The three of them then separated. They lost each other in the obscurities, the stillnesses broken excitably every now and then by the scamper of a disturbed rat. The deck of the hold was far from being overcrowded with cargo. Along the bulkheads great boxes of machinery loomed, well lashed, vast, secure-looking and, under different circumstances, certainly uninterestingly enough. But with their nerves, as they were, on a taut edge, the least sound, any peculiar arrangement of shadows or of dark splotched forms was sufficient to afford a thrill, a definite sensation of alarm. The three men were in a condition commonly known as jumpy.

"I see nothing."

Rutledge, more imaginative than the other two, felt the necessity of saying something, of breaking the spell of this illusive silence that so forcefully, so oppressively ruled the place. They met at the box, a tight little group, each one feeling a sense of relief, a glow of reflected assurance, a confirmation of his courage in the physical nearness—contact almost—of the other two.

They gave their undivided attention to the box itself. It was certainly an ordinary box, just like any number of packing cases that might contain any number of things, harmless, commonplace things. Its dimensions were calculated by each of them as being, roughly, eight by five by four; certainly large enough for the purpose for which it had been used.

"It's it!"

Hendriks and Hopper started. They stared at Rutledge.

"That paper there," Rutledge continued excitedly. "See it? Sticking out through the crack in the case? That's the kind of paper that note I found was written on. I knew I'd seen it some place before!"

"That helps to confirm our suspicions," Hendriks nodded to him gravely.

Hopper nervously handled the ax and chisel he had brought below to force open the box.

"Well, captain," he said, "how about it?"

"There is no sense in waiting, none whatsoever. Come."

They approached the box. Their little world close about them, measured by the bulkheads of the ship, seemed hovering in a vast expectancy; a little world of walled-in tenseness swinging in immensities of still, unnamable things that were crouched waiting—waiting for the sound of the first blow that would be struck against the box.

"I feel queer about it. I don't like it."

"None of us likes it, Mr. Rutledge."

"It's not the consequences I'm afraid of, sir; what the owners might say or what the Chinks might do to us ashore. It's—that!"

He gestured vaguely, letting his hand rest upon the cover of the box, instantly jerking it away again, as if it had come in contact with something hot, something that was dangerous.

Hopper set the chisel in the crack between the top boards and the face of the box. He pressed hard against it to wedge it into place for the first blow. The chisel entered the crack with surprising ease, slipping up to the point where his hand grasped it. The whole cover of the box lifted a fraction of an inch.

"It's not nailed—its hinged! The nails are fakes!"

The statements exploded from Hopper in three crescendoes. They stepped back for a moment, hesitant.

"That makes our work all the easier: Mr. Rutledge, be on guard in case anything should happen, anything unsuspected, from behind us."

Hendriks raised the cover of the box. It swung upward easily, as if its hinges had been oiled, and rested back against the bulkhead. They saw the lid of a metal coffin, richly and heavily chased in a minute, endlessly repeated design. It gave an immediate impression of wealth, a feeling of dignity, of great beauty. The spaces about the sides of the coffin and up to its lid were packed with tightly pressed excelsior.

"That's why the case is so big," Hopper indicated the excelsior. "I was wondering about it. It's much too big for just a coffin. Guess they didn't want to get it scratched. Don't blame them."



"There is one thing about this design on the lid," Hendriks tapped it with his finger. "These places that look like—well—sandpaper. I think they are hundreds of little holes pierced in the metal—air holes."

Rutledge, fast overcoming his original qualms, was examining the lid with a brave show of interest.

"How does she open up? It's not held down by screw things, like coffins I've seen," Rutledge said, having seen precisely one at the shore funeral of a shipmate. "I think it's hinged, like a box."

"Try it."

Rutledge swallowed a gasp. This was a horse of a different color. It wasn't so bad just examining the thing, even patting it, but to open it up— However, he couldn't let the old man see that his simple "try it" had knocked him one amidships.

Furthermore, there was that Harris up there, sticking his head over the edge of the hatch. He took hold of the lid of the coffin and tugged upon it gently. Nothing happened. Greatly relieved, he tugged again, this time harder. He wrenched it, worried it, grew positively insulting to it. Nothing still continued to happen. The lid remained fast, a solid sheet of bronze.

"Some job to force that!" Hopper looked the lid over judiciously. "Might never be able to with the tools we've got aboard. Certainly make an awful mess of it."

"We mustn't do that!" Hendriks, obviously worried, stared at them, baffled. "Just think if there shouldn't be anything wrong in there. If there should be just the body of this Chinaman, as White said; if we broke the coffin open, smashed it in any way—they've probably used all sorts of preservatives, liquid maybe. I know of a body that was shipped in alcohol. It leaked out somehow, the alcohol. It was terrible. They—they had to throw the whole thing over the side—nauseating!"

"Maybe there's a trick about it," Hopper suggested.

Rutledge hoped there was. And a good one at that.

"It's evidently Chinese make," Hopper

continued. "They do things like that, you know. All we may have to do is to press a knob or something. Let's get some of this packing out of the way. No harm in looking, is there?"

Hendriks became decisive. He shook off, with a finite gesture, the cloak of doubts and imaginings that had cluttered about him.

"There is no harm in looking," Hendriks struck the edge of the box with a clenched fist. "And harm or not, that coffin is going to be opened up!"

They took out excelsior until about six inches of the sides of the coffin stood exposed below the lid. They saw nothing more than smooth strips of metal, unbroken sheets of polished bronze.

"So much for knobs." Hopper showed his disappointment. "How about the lid itself? Let's press those designs there."

It would have been laughable under other circumstances. To Harris, peering down, entranced, over the edge of the hatch it seemed as if they must have suddenly gone mad. They might have been playing a piano; striving to awaken some strain of unearthly melodies to accompany their actions, weird and uncanny actions as they were to Harris, viewing the scene from above—an indelible scene on concentrated light splotted with shadows that streaked off into Cimmerian blackness; three idiotic figures beating out a devil's tattoo upon the flashing, brazen lid of what certainly appeared to be a coffin.

Suddenly the movement stopped.

The three were struck rigid, congealed by the thing that had just happened.

"Are you lifting it?" Hendriks broke the spell.

Each one of them on the spot received an introduction to a cold, icy chill. They took their hands from the lid. The lid, raised by the released power of concealed springs, stood open.

Lying upon the cushions of black velvet, the lights from the cargo cluster playing full upon her, was an extremely pale-faced and distressed-looking white girl.

At that moment the ship was plunged in darkness.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK**



# Wanted: A Bank President

By HENRY PAYSON DOWST

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

## CHAPTER I.

"IT COULD BE DONE."

OLD Joe Benson, president of the Benson Bank, of Templeton, was scolding young Joe for not wanting to be made head of that solid institution; and his son was not making a very successful defense.

"What does a bank president have to do, anyhow?" he asked.

"He has to know the community and its people and its needs; and he has to get business. Mostly, he has to get business, under present conditions. With Ed French coming home to take charge of the Sands County Trust & Savings, we'll need it.

And, Joey, I'd like to direct your attention to that same Ed French; there's a hustler for you. He'll make things hum in banking circles, I'm thinking.

"Every one says he's smarter'n a steel trap. Been to New York the last four or five years, studyin' fy-nance; and knows all the latest banking wrinkles. The old Benson will have to look out for itself."

"I went to school with Ed," said Joe.

"Yes; and I went to school with his father. And where's his father now? President of a one-hoss university. Say, old Sam French never made over three thousand dollars in one year in his life. Never wanted to, I guess; satisfied if he could get his nose into some book.

"But look at Ed—funny thing, I say—son of an unpractical man like Sam, as sharp as a gross of razors; and then you, with a big business opportunity held out to you on a platter, preferring to stick to botany and all that stuff. It beats my time."

"Have I done so badly with the lumber company?" demanded young Joe with a show of spirit.

"No, you've done as well as I ought to expect—better. Of course, I know you sort of tolerate it, because it gives you a chance to go off timber cruising two or three months a year, and incidentally study flowers and plants. I'd oughter be thankful, I suppose."

"Well, I am thankful, Joey. I ain't saying you're not a first-rate, principled young man. But your mother and I been looking forward to this trip a long time, and dog-gone if I don't get cold feet about leaving the bank, with young Ed French heaving up over the horizon to take charge of our competitor. He's going to be a bad actor, I suspect."

"All the more reason why you shouldn't put a dreamer like me in charge of the bank and then go off on a year's junket around the world. Father, I'm sorry. I wish I were the kind of son you could use in a pinch like this, but—"

"Well, you're the way God made you, Joey."

"Beth ought to have been a boy," ventured the son.

"She'd have made a good one. Still, I don't know. Beth suits me pretty well just as she is, Joe."

"Beth's all right, dad; you know I'm with you there."

"Yep, Beth's about right. But, holy smoke! I wish I could solve this bank problem. If I'd known soon enough, I might have got Ed French myself. I suppose he'd have cost me fifteen or twenty thousand dollars a year, but, from what I hear, he's worth it. Well, let's go home to dinner. Did you bring your car along?"

The two passed out of old Joe's private office in the bank—the old man heavy, rudely fashioned, but as strong as a bridge arch, his great head set solidly on big, stoop-

ing shoulders. You'd turn to look at old Joe Benson in any crowd. Young Joe was no more like him than as if there had been no remotest blood tie between them. The elder Benson had been, in his day, a rough customer—lumberjack, camp boss, speculator in timber lands, operator, and mill owner.

Beside his lumber interests, he owned substantially in various other enterprises of Templeton, a city of which he had been one of the chief builders. But the apple of his eye was the Benson Bank, founded fifteen years back, and now flourishing. Every one in the eastern part of the State knew Benson, and knew him to be as honest as he was capable and shrewd. They were glad to trust him with their money. They valued his advice in business matters; went to him personally with their applications for bank loans; and old Joe scrutinized every penny of business accommodation accorded by his bank.

Now he was sixty-six, and still rugged. His doctor told him he ought to knock off work for a year or so and enjoy himself. Why wait until something physically wrong showed up to force him into paths of idleness? Why not take a vacation that he could enjoy to the utmost?

Well, that was a good idea, too. Mrs. Benson heartily concurred, and the children, Joe and Beth, said they would do everything they could to make it possible for their father to depart with a clear conscience. Now, the very first thing old Joe asked young Joe to do, young Joe passed up.

If it weren't for Ed French, perhaps the old man wouldn't have minded; but the Sands County Trust & Savings had begun to make its competition felt. Not that Benson expected to monopolize the banking business of Templeton; a little wholesome competition was a good thing.

The Sands County Trust & Savings had been organized by citizens of Templeton who realized how the place had grown. They were friends of old Joe, too. They trafficked together amicably, compared notes and joshed each other good-naturedly when one or the other of the rival banks landed an especially attractive bit of busi-

ness. Benson had even been known to tip off the Sands County people when the bank examiner dropped in out of a clear sky.

But something told old Joe that Ed French was likely to stir things up a bit. Already there was a considerable difference in policy between the two institutions. People who dealt with the Benson Bank always felt that old Joe's personality pervaded it. To be sure, he had a carefully picked board of directors, and a few small blocks of stock had been parceled out among influential Templetonians who could and did influence business his way; but, to all intents and purposes, Joe Benson *was* the Benson Bank, and people knew it.

Of course, old Joe was old fashioned. He possessed a tremendous civic pride, and it had always seemed to him that what his bank could do for the community it was in duty bound to do. The bank made money, but that wasn't Joe's primary object in running it. He was too shrewd not to make money, but he was too good a citizen of this small industrial center to let acquisitiveness dominate his relations with his neighbors.

The Sands County Trust & Savings Company, however, had been started, frankly, as a money-making enterprise. It went after business with aggressiveness and determination, and got it. But there was very little of the personal in its attitude toward its patrons.

That may not be a fault, to be sure. Some people like one thing, some another. As one merchant put it, he didn't want to have to go and cry down old Joe Benson's neck to get a couple of thousand dollars to take his discounts. Old Joe knew altogether too much about the affairs of individuals in Templeton; yes, sir!

On the evening following young Joe's declination of the presidency of his father's bank the latter brought up the matter again. Joe's sister Beth was at home; oddly enough, she wasn't going anywhere, but seemed quite content to sit and read a magazine. I'll tell you a little more about Beth later—what sort of girl she was, and what she looked like, and all that. Just now her father was telling young Joe something about banking.

"Greatest business in the world," he orated. "Gosh! You deal in money,—same as a storekeeper deals in groceries or dry goods. Fascinatin', I tell you. And, say, there never was a time when there was such a chance for developing new business as there is to-day. Here we are, right in the midst of a good, fat farming country. When have the farmers been so prosperous as they've been in the last few years? Not so long ago, when you said 'farmer,' you about the same as said 'pauper.' Farmin' was the hardest, most thankless, unprofitable thing a man could do. No farmer ever saw ten dollars in cash money from one month's end to another. Look at the farmers to-day.

"And they don't know, comparatively, a dog-gone thing about what the banks can do for 'em. Not around here; of course, in some communities they have learned a little ahead of the rest of us.

"The country hereabouts is pretty near virgin territory. I've never had time to develop it—bank grew too fast as it was. I could of done a lot if I'd wanted to. Now, with our new building, and better facilities—and, incidentally, increased overhead—we can take care of all the farmer business we can get.

"And, by the way, it isn't so terrible easy to get. A farmer is a funny bird. He doesn't fall for new ideas very easy, and—apparently—he's cagey with his money. He hangs onto it, and gets suspicious of every one who looks cross-eyed at his pocket-book; and then, like as not, he buys a whole boilin' of stock in the Lucky Jinx Oil Company from some total stranger with a plaid suit and a diamond scarfpin. Same time, he wouldn't buy a block of the safest bonds ever issued.

"You got to study him and work your way into his confidence. He's hard to teach, but he learns his lesson well, and he's well worth the trouble, if you're patient. Anybody that 'd make a special study of farmers and their peculiarities and needs would find a dozen ways of servin' 'em, helpin' the community, and at the same time making a good thing out of the business that would develop."

"What's the matter with Garvin?" asked

Joe. He's been your cashier about seven years. Why not give him the chance?"

"Because I was hopin' I'd get a Benson. Besides, Will Garvin isn't the type, though he's a good fellow and a first-rate cashier. Darned if I know what to do; presume likely we'll stay home. Mother and I sure would like to take that trip around the world that starts the first of December. But with the Sands County's deposits slowly creepin' up on us, and that gimlet-eyed Ed French comin' into the game—oh, hummy, dummy! I dunno, I dunno. Say, sis, your name's Benson; want to be a bank president? Joe, he'd rather study flowers."

Beth looked up from her magazine.

"Were you speaking to me, dad?" she asked vaguely. "Perhaps I ought to have been paying attention—"

"Oh, it wasn't anything. Guess I was trying to be witty. Didn't mean to interrupt you."

"That's all right," said Beth, and dropped her eyes once more to her magazine.

Presently she announced her intention of retiring and departed. She went up the stairs slowly, thoughtfully, touched the wall switch that controlled the lights in her room, and walked deliberately up to the mirror. Here, for two or three minutes, she stood and contemplated her own reflection—rather unusual for Beth, who wasn't especially vain, as girls of her age go.

"Poor old dad," she mused. "Poor, nice old dad—seems sort of a shame Joe's so—well, that isn't Joe's fault, either."

She turned away from the glass and began her preparations for sleep. She was very thoughtful. As she again touched the wall switch she might have been heard—but wasn't—to murmur, half aloud: "It could be done if a person had the—the ginger!"

## CHAPTER II.

### HATED RIVALS.

"**B**ETH," said Elmer Curtiss, "you're a wonder."

Elmer was right. The remark was occasioned by the way Beth Benson ma-

nipulated her car. Some people, men as well as women, seem never quite to get the hang of starting a motor car. They give it too much gas and go into low with a raucous grinding of gears; they let their clutch in with a jerk that slips the tires and jolts the engine; they go from first into second with more complaint of outraged cogs; and, finally, when they get into high, the poor harassed mechanism humps and hesitates and threatens to lie down, or else gets away with a neck-breaking impulse disquieting to any save the most impervious nerves.

Not so with Miss Elizabeth Benson. Her car always started as gently as a fresh breeze off a summer lake, and drifted from one speed into another as easily as a canoe picks up the successful impulses of a skillful paddler. Beth was knacky. She leaned back easily in her seat, touched her self-starter, gave the engine a preparatory spin and was off without any complaining whir and snarl.

"Nothing wonderful about me," she replied. "I just don't worry—much. What makes you think I'm a wonder, Elmer?"

"Oh, you do things so—so—so dog-gone smooth. If you had been born a boy what a business man you'd have made!"

"Oh, I don't know; I've always found it pretty good fun being a girl. Sometimes I think father 'd like me to have been a boy—and then again—well, he's an old dear, anyhow."

"Yeah," agreed Elmer. The idea of cataloging gnarly Joe Benson as a "dear" struck him as nothing short of ludicrous. "Think Joe junior's business man enough to suit the pater?"

"Why not? I'm sure he's been very faithful with the lumber company—and successful."

"Yeah. He's got a great collection of specimens, too. Knows a lot about stamens and calyxes and all that—wonder he can keep his mind on sordid things like logs and stumpage. Still, Joe's a nice boy; guess every one likes him."

"Joey's perfectly splendid," said Beth. "If you knew what he had to give up just to go into the lumber mill and help father—"

"Oh, say, Beth, heard about Ed. French—I mean Edward Chesterton French?"

"I heard he was back from New York and going into the Sands County Trust."

"But Beth—he's to be president. Think of that—regular salary, too. There's a case of honor being profitable in a chap's own country, eh? They say Ed's awfully smart."

Beth's car was drawing well out into the thinly settled portion of Templeton. There was a dance at the country club that evening.

"I suppose he'll be among our midst to-night," she said.

"Oh, absoutely; he wouldn't miss it. Kind of making his debut, I should think. I suppose all the pretty Janes will fall for him—and the plain ones, too. He's a mighty good-looking fellow; you've got to hand it to him. He's all right. I like him—always did."

"Yes," said Beth. "Ed was popular in school. I think I'm violating no confidence when I say he was rather smitten with little Beth seven or eight years ago. I suppose some of the buds will interest him more now."

"Any bud," cried Elmer Curtiss, loyally, "who can hold a candle to you, Beth Benson, hasn't crossed my path yet—not in this burg."

"Don't be silly, Elmer," said Beth, stepping gently on the gas. "I'm getting pretty well in to the sear and yellow."

"Huh!" remarked Elmer. "You give me a pain, talking like that."

You couldn't blame Elmer, for Beth Benson was in appearance about as far from the sear and yellow as a girl could well be. I hesitate to start in describing Beth, because later in this story you will wonder how such a pretty girl can possess so many other recommendations. You might say it wasn't fair for good looks and style and amiability and a brain as keen as a razor all to be allotted to one girl not a day over—there, now, I've forgotten how old Beth was. She was younger than her brother Joe, though; I'm sure about that.

And she was a happy mean between a blonde and a brunette—sort of a nice golden brown as to hair, with auriferous streaks

running through it; and her eyes were a selected shade of blue, rather dark. She had a—no, sir, not for one moment—she did not have a piquant little tip-tilted nose that was saucy and defiant and—well, I'm tired of cute girls, and Beth Benson wasn't cute.

She was five feet six, maybe seven, and not slender enough to be fragile. But she wasn't fat. She wasn't even plump. She was rather a substantial figure of young womanhood, though, and very, very charming. She had grown up in Templeton, and because old Joe Benson had had a great deal to do with building the town to its present status of thriving prosperity, she loved it. She wasn't fanatical in this respect, but went with a fair degree of regularity to New York to shop and study the styles; but always came home and had Miss Hitchings, a local dressmaker, build her clothes.

Miss Hitchings was all right if you didn't let her give her own ideas about style too much scope. She was a competent artist and employed good seamstresses, so that if you knew how you wanted a thing made and told her plainly, she could turn out a creditable job—oh, not a Fifth Avenue twawlette, of course—but Beth Benson had known Miss Hitchings ever since her primary school days and liked her, and Beth was one of the kind who think friendships mean more than gay little condescending greetings on street corners.

So Beth always looked stylish. I tell you, she was knacky. This facility extended to her dealings with people just as fully as it expressed itself in the management of her automobile.

Beth and her escort reached the country club in the middle of the evening, say about nine thirty. The place was crowded, and you could hear the strains of Phil Jipp's Celebrated Jazz Orchestra as soon as you turned into the lane.

Beth let Elmer park her car for her while she ran lightly up the steps and into the clubhouse, where she got rid of her wraps; and then she waited near the door for Elmer. Several of her friends greeted her joyously and told her they were glad she had decided to come; and one young man broke away from a group of which he

seemed to be the center and came over with a hand outstretched rather formally.

"Hello, Beth," he said. "Remember me?"

"Why, Ed French, how ridiculous! Of course I remember you. How long has it been?"

"Eight years. I tell you, it's great to be back."

"And I hear you've come in a blaze of glory, too."

"Blaze nothing," deprecated the young man. "I've got a job, that's all—a good, hard one. Some one had a lot of confidence to recommend me for it. And, say, I wish it might have been with your father's bank. I used to hope I might be associated with him some day. Now I understand we're to be hated rivals. 'S terrible!"

"Maybe he'd have been glad to get you, Ed, if he'd realized what a big acquisition you'd have been; I understand they're delighted over at the Sands County. They're expecting great things of you."

"Have to go some, won't I? Say, will you excuse me? I'll be back pretty quick; got a dance with Martha Brooks. And save next one but one for me, will you? 'At's a girl."

He dashed off. Beth gazed after him speculatively. Elmer came in from the porch.

"You were talking with the young Napoleon of Wall Street, I see," observed Elmer. "Meant to shake hands with him, but he got away. He's a spiffy dresser, I'll say."

Beth had been thinking the same thing. Ed French had on what some of the Templeton boys would have called an "evening full dress suit." And it was stunning, too. Its cut and fit marked it as the unmistakable product of an exclusive New York tailor.

This being an informal mid-week dance, the men had not been expected to "dress." Some of them had gone so far as to put on white flannel trousers and blue coats, a recognized form of semidress for summer affairs like this. Most of them appeared in mufti; and they weren't an ill-groomed crowd at that. It was simply that full dress wasn't thought necessary—small town stuff,

if you like, but, then, Templeton was a small town.

Ed French's rather ultraevening clothes therefore marked him as a being apart. It wasn't Ed's fault. He'd know better another time. Every one understood, and there were few who cared to criticize him—in fact, it may have been that some few envied him not only the clothes, but the undoubted self-possession with which he wore them.

The young man was popular; always had been. Now he was as rapidly as possible renewing his acquaintanceships. He had come home to settle down, to become a part of the community, to get his living here, to weave himself into its affairs. He knew he would make mistakes; probably the "evening dress suit" was only one of them, and the least disastrous; but he was too level-headed to permit himself to make the same mistake twice.

He was certainly not chump enough to think that because he had showed up at an informal country club dance in a swagger evening get-up he was going to find fifty or sixty others similarly clad when he went to another such gathering. Ed didn't imagine he was going to invade Rome and play the piper; he had to do what the Romans did, or they'd never make a fellow Roman of him and put their money in his bank.

The son of President Samuel French, over at the university, was exceedingly good looking, exceedingly sophisticated, absolutely self-possessed. If he had a fault, it was probably that of being too well aware of himself. He was distinctly *not* small town stuff. Templeton was a small town, and its people were of small town caliber, to outward semblance. Some of the young men had their clothes "made to measure" by a mail order house which assured them Fifth Avenue styles at the price of ready-mades; some patronized local tailors; some bought their apparel off the pile.

Now this is not saying they were not well-bred, well-dressed and well-mannered. They moved in the consciousness that they were "just as good as any one else." Templeton people made good livings and lived well, drove the standard makes of motor

cars and built little canopies across the sidewalk from the church door when their daughters got married.

Nevertheless, Ed French was different. He himself didn't realize how different, because he had accustomed himself to the ways of a different world. He had perhaps forgotten that New York standards and Templeton standards were not the same, believing that there was only one set of standards, and those the standards of New York. A good many people are that way.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ED MAKES A HIT.

THE evening at the country club moved merrily forward and every one had a perfectly splendid time. Ed French was a distinct addition to the company. Templeton people had always liked him and now they liked him more, because he brought with him a new atmosphere which was refreshing. He had a lot of new stories.

He made an amazing hit with the girls. They hadn't realized before how good looking he was, and now, with his acquired airs of the big city, he possessed a fascination that was irresistible. Templeton folks congratulated themselves that Ed French had come back to live among them. He was going to shed luster on Templeton; he was a real acquisition.

Ed was pretty careful to dance with the right girls—and by that I don't mean what you think I mean. He didn't obviously pick out the pretty girls, the rich ones, the popular ones; rather, it was observed that he went a little out of his way to favor some of the most egregious wall flowers in Templeton, girls who weren't used to being sought, girls who were actually grateful for being danced with.

Consider how you would feel, provided you were usually pleased to have even the runty little misfits dance with you, the ones with two left feet, who breathed heavily, as if dancing were something like putting in baskets of coal—the ones whom other girls made excuses to avoid dancing with—consider how you would feel to have a chap like Ed French come rushing up as though

he were afraid if he didn't hurry some other guy would beat him to it and make you think the happiness of his entire evening depended on this one dance?

I guess you would be glad Ed French had come back to Templeton; and I guess you would think a trust company pretty lucky to have that sort of young man for its president; and I guess, yet a third time, that you would tell your father or your brother so.

It is also well within the bounds of possibility that your father or brother, being wise in the ways of this world, would reach the conclusion that Mr. Edward Chesterton French was a pretty smooth worker. But of course they wouldn't blame him for that.

"Beth," said Ed French when he got a good chance, "how have things gone with you? Doesn't seem to me you look much different from the way you looked when we went to high school together, and I—I was—well, you know, Beth. Look!"

He pulled his watch from its pocket and popped open the back.

"Mercy!" said Beth. "That old thing."

"All through college, and all through the years I've been working to learn what little I know about the financial game—"

"That being a part of one's watch that is seldom opened," said Beth, "I suppose it was easy to forget it was there."

"On the contrary, Beth, there hasn't been a day—"

"I hope you didn't show it to any one. Goodness gracious, look at the sleeves! Aren't they killing? Ed, how do you like banking? Don't you wish you were a professor, like your father?"

"It's the greatest business in the world."

"I suppose so—in New York. But here in Templeton?"

"Right here in Templeton. In New York the field has been raked with a fine tooth comb; in a place like this it is practically untouched."

"But with two banks—father's and the Sands County Trust—I should suppose the ground pretty well covered."

French laughed.

"Ask dad, he knows," he chuckled.

"I've heard him say a little healthy competition is good for any business."



"Surely. I guess we can supply it; though, as I told you, Beth, I'd have been pleased if it had been your father's bank that offered me the job. Great personality, your father. That's what has made his bank a success. People believe in him. When they think of the Benson Bank, it's that vigorous, rugged old face of his that pops into their minds. Of course your father is the Benson Bank, and he is an old-fashioned banker. I don't know how many there are left of a similar caliber, and of course they're growing scarcer. Banking is getting more and more on an impersonal basis, according to my way of thinking."

"Meaning, I suppose, that men like father are beginning to be out of date?"

"Oh, no, no; don't misunderstand me," cried Ed French.

At the same time, Beth was wondering why he went out of his way to be nice to the wall-flower daughters of well-to-do Templetonians.

"But, of course," went on the young man, "that's all shop talk. No reason why I should afflict you with my business. Besides, I'd rather dance. Some night I'll come over to your house and explain some of my banking ideas—of course, not forgetting that you're a competitor. And then I think I shall make love to you; yes, I'm sure of it. By George, you're prettier than you were before I went away. And wouldn't the neighbors be pleased? Your dad, too—he'd like it. He and my governor are old schoolmates."

It surprised Beth Benson to realize that this line of conversation left her quite cold. Ed rattled along happily.

"Might even bring about a consolidation of the two banks—in time. That seems a large idea, eh? Consolidate the families and the business. Your brother Joe and my dad could go into some sort of intellectual partnership, and I'd relieve Papa Benson of a lot of business worries. He could take a good, long vacation—Oh, boy, let's dance! That coon with the saxophone certainly does know his job."

Beth realized that beneath a surface of semibanter lay a vein of genuine seriousness, but no response came to life in her own consciousness except a slight embar-

assment and the impulse to say something sharp. This was unlike Beth Benson; her nature was essentially generous.

Now she looked back over the eight years during which Ed French had been away from home and tried to remember just what sort of boy he had been, and it came to her that, even in the last of his teens, he hadn't been fundamentally different from the Ed French who now danced with her so smoothly. He had always been assured, self-possessed, confident. People had always called him smart, and they had always said he was a boy fully capable of taking care of himself.

So now she perceived in him only a logical development from boy to man, just what one might have expected. He couldn't even be sentimental without being commercial. Of course, it was all in fun, but that chatter about consolidating the families and the banks—

One of the sort who knows how to make one hand wash the other—that was Edward Chesterton French, she thought. She wondered how many other people realized this. Oh, yes, he was a splendid chap—there was no denying that. Probably she was oversensitive; but why was it that she felt there was always a string attached to anything Ed did or said?

His whimsical proposal certainly possessed the merit of spontaneity, and most any Templeton girl would have been flattered by it. Beth didn't feel flattered. She was a bit older than some of the other girls—she wasn't a flapper any more. She even told herself she was close on the verge of being an old maid.

Neither did it please Beth to hear Ed French speak of a race of old-fashioned bankers in that condescending, semitolerant manner, as of something fast going out of date. Old Joe, in Beth's eyes, expressed about everything fine that a mere mortal could be expected to typify. If he was an "old-fashioned" banker, that was the best kind of banker a man could be, rather than something soon to be counted among the interesting relics of an easy-going past, in which business relations were *personal*. So people thought of her father, did they, when they thought of the Benson Bank?

She wondered how much it would help the Sands County to have them think of Ed French as typifying that institution. Well, that remained to be seen.

And Mr. French was going to come over to the house and tell her such things about the real, up-to-date, modern idea of banking as he thought prudent, was he? At the same time, he was going to pursue his interrupted courtship; and the end was to be, all in Ed French's good time, a consolidation—

Suddenly Beth, fox-trotting gayly to the strident cadences of Phil Jipp's Celebrated Jazz Orchestra, felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to laugh. But, of course, she did control it.

That night Ed invited Beth to ride home with him in his car. Beth thanked him, and later passed him on the road with her muffler cut-out open. It wasn't very polite, but somehow she felt that way.

"Ed French cut a wide swath to-night, didn't he?" remarked Elmer Curtiss, hanging on to the sides of his seat as the car swerved ticklishly near the ditch. "Say, Beth, what's your awful hurry?"

"Did he? I guess he went there for that purpose."

"Why, Beth Benson, that isn't like you. Folks say he's crazy about you, anyhow. I'll say he made the hit of the evening. He'll be popular when he gets over some of his New York swank—that's natural. He's the same old Ed at bottom. Every one had a good word for him; that is, every one but you. I'm surprised."

"Oh, Ed's all right," said Beth. "I oughtn't to have said what I did. Please don't repeat it."

"Me? Gosh, you know me, Beth. Thanks for the ride. Any time you want some real lively company and have an extra seat— Well, see you in church. Good night."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### BETH MAKES A CALL.

**M**RS. HEZEKIAH SWIFT went out into the side yard with a big dish of waste for the chickens. "Chick, chick, chick!" she called shrilly, and a

hundred or more frenzied birds responded with a rush and a flutter. Then, as suddenly, they scattered with terrified squawks, for a motor car came into the yard and slowed down with a squeal of brakes.

"How do you do?" said a cheerful voice.

Mrs. Hezekiah Swift looked up, almost as startled as her chickens.

"How d'ye do?" she replied.

"I wondered," went on the cheerful voice, which now appeared to belong to a brisk young woman—"I wondered whether I could get a few ears of fresh sweet corn."

"Well, if you can, it 'll be pretty much the last o' the season; but I guess I can manage."

"We never get any that's decent from the market," went on Beth Benson. "It ought to be eaten within a few hours of being picked."

"I was a puttin' of it up," said Mrs. Swift. "My husband raises a heap of it for the city trade, but I cal'late to save out some of the last for preservin'. Way I do it, you wouldn't hardly be able to tell it from fresh pulled. I put it into two-quart jars on the cob, and when I have good luck it's real nice. But I guess I can spare you a little off the stalk. How much would you like?"

"Can you spare a dozen and a half or two dozen ears?"

"Land's sake! I thought you wanted a wagon load. You want to pull it yourself, or will you wait?"

"I'll go with you," said Beth. "Father will be so pleased. Our name is Benson."

"Do tell. You don't mean your father's Mr. Benson, the lumber-mill man? Guess every one knows you folks."

Together the two women proceeded past the farmhouse into the field where some late planted corn still waved its tassels in the afternoon breeze.

"The' ain't nothin' quite like fresh-picked sweet corn," observed Mrs. Swift. "City folks hardly ever git it when it's tender. You'd ought to of come out often this season; we had such heaps of it."

"Seems as if it's putting people to a lot of trouble, just to pull a few ears."

"Trouble? Seeing a new face more than pays for what little trouble it is. I often

tell Hez that's the one drawback to farm-in'; it's so lonesome. Anyhow, it is since the children grew up. Sometimes I wish the summer was twice as long, on account of having our grandchildren with us that much longer."

"You don't mean to say you have grandchildren!"

Mrs. Swift dimpled. She did look amazingly young, standing there shoulder deep among the green corn stalks, her arms full of the feathery ears.

"Indeed I have. One's five years old, too. There—did you say a dozen and a half? Better take two dozen; there's plenty."

Together they returned to the car. Beth produced a handful of change from a small pocketbook.

"Now, you put your money right away," said Mrs. Swift. "Funny I'd have to charge you for a few measly ears o' sweet corn. No, not one single penny! Probably would of gone to seed, anyhow. Wish you would come in and have a dish of tea; it isn't so late. Seems to me I'd relish a dish of tea real well. Land sakes! I don't have any one to make tea for once in a dog's age. Do come in."

Beth could find no excuse for refusal. She sat in Mrs. Swift's quaint "settin' room," with its rag rugs and reed bottom chairs and general air of thrift and neatness.

"What a wonderful piece of gingham," she said, picking up a half-finished garment from the table.

"Now, ain't it?" agreed Mrs. Swift, poking purposefully at the stove and pushing the teakettle forward. "Do you know, I've had that gingham for over ten years? Fact! I saved it. Knew it would come in handy some day, and now I'm making it up into a dress for my daughter Nellie's little girl. Making it a full size too big, too, so she'll grow to it. Maybe you know my daughter Nellie—her husband works for the lumber company."

"Well, of course, you couldn't know every one in a town's big's Templeton. You like your tea strong or weak? I favor mine right strong. Folks say you hadn't ought to drink too much strong tea, but

I don't see's it ever hurt me. My son Jim says— 'There, that makes me think. My son Jim 'll be twenty-four years old come next Thursday, and I've got to send him somethin' for a present. I s'pose whatever I send 'll be somethin' he's got. I declare I'd about as soon send him money and let him pick out what he wants. He lives 'way out in Idyho. Trouble is, I haven't had no chance to go to the post office to buy a money order—"

"Why not send him a check?"

"Well, I'd have to go into Templeton to the bank and get 'em to give me a check, and pay 'em for the accommodation. That is just as much trouble."

"I don't believe my father's bank would charge you anything for the accommodation," said Beth.

She didn't know. It suddenly occurred to her that if such a charge were made it would be in the nature of extortion. Here was a prosperous family, producing by the sweat of its conglomerate brow the subsistence for scores of people, supporting dozens of non-producers— Well, what was a bank for? What would her father think about it?

"It would depend on the bank," she heard herself say. "My idea of a bank is an institution to serve people, to help them, to do a lot of things for them to make life easier to live, to facilitate business—why, to help out in just such a situation as the one you speak of."

"Banks was always kind of a mystery to me," said Mrs. Swift. "Oh, I know you can put money into a savings bank and get four per cent for the use of it, and it's kept safe for you, only you have to put it in a certain day and leave it in a certain length of time, or you don't get interest. Banks are all right for folks with plenty of money, I suppose."

Banks a mystery to people! Was a dry goods store a mystery to Mrs. Swift? Of course not. Was there anything mysterious about the big mail order house to which she sent frequently for household supplies? Mrs. Swift knew that if she went to the hardware store or the jeweler in Templeton and bought a quantity of merchandise, it would be delivered to her

home by parcel post reasonably soon. The idea of merchandising in these modern times was to give service, to increase the customer's convenience. The idea concerning a bank seemed not to have penetrated the intelligence of women like Mrs. Swift.

"Didn't it ever occur to you that a bank was something you could make an everyday convenience of?" she asked.

"Land sakes, no! My husband, he says the dog-gone banks have got the whole country by the neck. I don't suppose I should talk that way to you, what with your father's ownin' a bank."

Mrs. Swift blushed, and asked if Miss Benson wouldn't have a little mite more of the rawsb'ry preserve.

Beth smiled.

"It only goes to show," she said. "Mrs. Swift, when are you coming to town again?"

"Well, I don't know. I go right often."

"To-morrow?"

"I could. We got a real good car, and Hez lets me drive it about all I want to."

"You meet me at father's bank at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon and let me show you around a little. It would be a great pleasure. Does Mr. Gibbs, the dry goods man, like to have new people come into his store?"

"I should say he does. He'll drop an old customer any minute to look after a new one."

"Banks are the same way. If they are not, they ought to be. Of course, I don't have anything to do with our bank; but I'll be there. I don't know any better way I can show my appreciation for your kindness to me to-day than to tell you a little about our bank and what it does for people. And—Mrs. Swift."

"Yessum."

"If you'd like to bring one or two of your friends—"

"I was just thinking of Mis' Crafts and Mis' Gillespie—"

"Bring Mrs. Crafts and Mrs. Gillespie. And—one thing more. Do you think I came here to-day just to get you to come to the bank? I really did want the corn—"

"Bless your heart, honey, it wouldn't

of made any difference to me, not the least mite. Now you can just count on seein' us ladies—only you be sure to be on hand. Gracious me, I shouldn't know what to do to find myself adrift in a bank without any guide. I'd just turn and scatter, that's what I'd do."

## CHAPTER V.

### BETH TALKS BUSINESS.

"WHO'S the collection of suburban sisters Miss Beth's dragging around the plant this afternoon?"

asked Garvin, the cashier of Benson's Bank, of Busby, the paying teller.

"I was wondering," replied Busby. "She's sure doing our institution proud. Guess they must be the wives of some of our prominent rural millionaires."

"Yep," agreed Garvin. "They look like it. Pipe the lid on Mrs. Vanderbilt."

"Jussa same," put in Busby, "you never can tell. Dames like that might have a stockingful of mazuma tucked away some place. Trust lil Beth; she doesn't overlook any bets."

It amused Mr. Busby, two days later, to have Mr. Garvin escort Mrs. Eva D. Swift up to the teller's window and inform him that she was a customer of the bank. Later, Busby took pains to find out just how much of a customer Mrs. Swift was, and grinned when he learned that, as treasurer of the Ladies' Missionary League of the Cedar Bend Baptist Church, Mrs. Swift had deposited one hundred and thirty-seven and eighteen-hundredths dollars to her credit, and had been presented with a check book, a pass book and a bunch of deposit slips.

After that Mrs. Swift found herself treated with quite the same consideration as John P. Somers, of the Universal Tannage & Belting Company, an important industry of Templeton. Word trickled down from old Joe's big desk in the front of the bank that this was so. A customer of the bank was a customer of the bank, not always to be judged by the size of his daily balance.

It took Garvin and Busby several weeks, however, to find out that Miss Benson was

spending evenings out in the remote county districts delivering lectures in words of one syllable to sewing circles and grange meetings on such subjects as "The Convenience of the Household Checking Account," and "Why the Bank Belongs to All the Community." It took them even longer to find out that the same young lady was delivering to an audience restricted to two, or even one, strictly private addresses of which this is a fair sample:

"You think it's quite a feather in your cap when you get one of the merchants of the town to drop a couple of thousand dollars into your lap for you to use making loans to other business men at six per cent, don't you?"

"Well, Beth, that's approved bankin' practice. We let 'em have a couple per cent on daily balance if they keep five hundred on the books—"

"If they ask for it. I suppose the Sands County crowd do the same thing."

"I haven't noticed any grass growin' under the Sands County's feet, especially since young French took a hold over there. And I ain't noticed him going out after any ladies' sewing circle accounts, either. Long's you burn gasoline scrappin' the country for those small accounts, I don't suppose it 'd be right to turn 'em down, but you ought to know a profitable account doesn't run much below two hundred—"

"It's your bank, father, and you have your ideas about how it should be run; and any time you want to put a two-hundred-dollar limit on checking accounts, that's your privilege. But, somehow, I have quite a different idea about a bank from yours. Suppose the public library made a rule that a person couldn't qualify as a subscriber unless he took out at least three books a week—"

"Now, Beth, when you talk that way, strikes me you're getting sort of foolish. A public library isn't a money-making enterprise."

"No; and a bank is. Bankers, like you and Mr. Edward Chesterton French, forget that a bank is a public utility and that it's almost common property like the water works or the street cars, and that if people didn't patronize it liberally it simply

wouldn't exist. Do you know what I'd do if I owned Benson's Bank?"

"I'd print 'In the Public Service' on every letterhead and every envelope you use; and right over the door I'd have, in letters of gold, 'What Can We Do for You?' That would be a slogan with advertising value."

"Well, dog-gone it, Beth, Bill Frye come into the bank day before yesterday and wanted five thousand dollars. Would you have let him have it, unless he had collateral somethin' like gov'ment bonds to put up for it?"

"Bill Frye? I wouldn't lend Bill Frye a counterfeit nickel."

"You wouldn't? Sakes alive! I sh'd thought you'd fell on his neck and given him the bronze grille work over the teller's window, the way you talk."

Beth shook her head.

"But Bill Frye's doin' a nice business, maybe more'n any other cloak and suit house in town; and all he wanted the money for was to take his discounts. My land, women are unreasonable."

"Did you let him have the five thousand?" said Beth, slyly.

Her father grinned.

"Not so as you would notice it, I didn't. But I'd of bet my last winter's overcoat you would."

Beth shook her head.

"I sit right behind his wife in church," she said. "I couldn't lend money to a man whose wife wears hats like hers."

"Well—dog my cats if that ain't a hell of a rea—say, you'd get a loud laugh sittin' on an executive committee meetin' passin' on loans in your bank. Hats! Land of Goshen!"

Beth grinned.

"Maybe that was just my way of expressing myself," she said. "Mrs. Frye is a woman of notoriously bad taste. She is also famous for extravagance. Any one in this town who knows anything says she keeps poor Mr. Frye's nose on the grindstone from morning until night. No wonder he can't earn his discounts; his living expenses eat up his capital so he's always on the ragged edge. You don't think I regard a bank as a wet nurse for helpless busi-

ness infants, do you? Did Mr. Frye get his five thousand?"

"I heard he got it over at the Sands County Trust. He checked out his balance from our books in their favor. Maybe Ed French thought a nice, active account like that was worth taking a chance for. And you know Bill Frye is a persuasive duck; what he can't do with figures I guess hardly any one could do."

"I know; but what his wife can do with hats is quite another story."

"I wish Joey had your brains," sighed old Joe.

"No, you don't, father; you wish he had a little more of my kind of brains. How much has Ed French increased the deposits over at the Sands County?"

"Half a million."

"Catching up with us pretty fast, old dear?"

"I didn't say that. In fact, I don't think they're making what you'd call real giant strides; we put on nearly seven hundred thousand, what with the new cotton mills and the print works. But Ed was going to cut a lot of ice out in the highways and byways—what he calls the rural district—and darned if I don't think he and that sky-blue-pink runabout of his have made an impression on the bucolic mind. Of course it's a little mite early to tell; pretty soon the apple and wheat and oat crops will have to be taken care of, and labor's away up, when you can get any—well, I don't see's we're going to have more'n our share."

"There's a lot of demand for call money at higher rates in the city," hazarded Beth.

"What do you know about— Say, you be'n reading the papers, I guess. Now lemme tell you something; this bank is fifteen years old, and in all that time I kep' one thing in mind—Templeton first. I know, when we got a surplus we could ship a barrel or so to New York and get eight or nine per cent for it, but you think I would?"

"Not to any large extent! Maybe the Sands County 'll go out and show some of these rubes a thing or two about modern bankin', but you can bet your life when the local fellers want the old dough at six per cent to pay their help, it's goin' to be right here for 'em, and don't you forget—"

Old Joe Benson suddenly found speech inhibited by a human avalanche precipitated upon him from across the room.

"Dad!" said the avalanche. "I knew it all the time. You and I don't have to go to New York for our clothes, do we? And there's something in banking besides making a lot of money, isn't there? And fifteen years of serving the public do count for something, don't they? You don't blame me for going out and inviting a few old benighted sisters to come and see what a jim-dandy bank we've got, and you don't turn your nose up at a daily balance of a hundred and two dollars and forty-seven cents—now do you?"

"And if I put in a bill for thirteen gallons of gasoline that I've used running around the country, you're going to O. K. it just like a lamb, aren't you? I knew you would—I told Garvin you would, and he laughed at me and wanted to know when the next meeting of the sewing circle was to be held—darn him; I suppose he's a great banker."

"Garv? Oh, Garvin's all right; only sometimes I think he's a little narrow between the eyes, that's all."

## CHAPTER VI.

HEZ HAS A PAIN.

**H**EZEKIAH SWIFT, with blood in his eye, invaded the solemn precincts of Benson's Bank and demanded audience with the president of that institution.

"Hello, Hez," said old Joe. "Come in and set."

Old Joe's desk was well out in front, separated from the concourse by a stout fence of solid oak. Hez pushed open the gate and slammed it behind him with unnecessary violence.

"Joe," he said, "I want fifteen hundred dollars, and I want it blame sudden."

"You mean, you want it with a considerable degree of precipitation," corrected old Joe calmly.

"I want it in cash," said Hezekiah Swift. "Busby," roared old Joe. "Count out fifteen hundred dol—you didn't say how you wanted it, Hez."

"Mostly in tens and fives."

"What? At two thirty in the afternoon? Bus! He wants it mostly in tens and fives. I suppose, Hez, you've come all cocked and primed with various and sundry forms of collateral and other valu'bles."

"I ain't come cock and primed with nawthin'," retorted Hezekiah. "I guess if my face ain't good for fifteen hundred measly dollars I better go farm it out some place for a butcher's choppin' block."

"You want all the money now, or be you goin' t' leave some of it on deposit. We got some of the prettiest little checkbooks—"

"That's right; I'll take half in cash and leave seven fifty subject to check. By gosh! Them folks over to the Sands County give me a severe pain. Young Ed French—say, who give him a license to run a bank, anyhow?"

"Why, Ed French? He's an expert. He's a goin' to revolutionize bankin' methods around this neck of the woods. What's he gone and done to you, Hez?"

"Oh, nawthin'. Only I went in there in kind of a rush a little spell ago— Say, you know when the Sands County was org'nized I was one of the ones that said I'd patternize it. I cal'lated this here town was big enough for two banks—don't know but it is, too."

"Kep' quite a scad o' money there for the last five year. Of course it warn't active money; maybe I oughter kep' it movin'. I never borried a cent, nuther. This year I sorter spread myself on wheat, and you know how it is—bigger prices comin' long Christmas, sure's shootin'. I says to myself, dum if I sell everything just now; I'll hang on a bit. Went into Sands County and asked as polite as you please for fifteen hundred, and what do you think? They had to have my pedigree clean away back to Adam, and Ed French, he said he'd put it up to his executive board to-morrow mornin'—an' me needin' the money to pay off with to-night—say, I was mad!"

"And then I happened to think. You got a gal, Beth; she was to my house a chinnin' with th' old lady not long sence, and dum if she didn't get her to put the missionary fund into your bank. Showed her all about runnin' a checkin' account and all that, and

had her and some other women folks in here and showed 'em around—say, thinks I, me and Joe Benson always been pretty good friends. He knows me root and branch and dog my cats if bankin' don't run into the whole family—all except maybe young Joe."

"Bet you, I says to myself, Joe Benson ain't goin' to put on no style if I go over'n ask him for a little change to help a feller out. So I done it. Say, did I act mad when I come in here? I was, by gorry! I was good an' het up; little squirt like Ed French askin' me a lot o' fool questions and fillin' of 'em out on a card half as big as a newspaper!"

"Thanks, Joe; and say, you and the women take a run out our way, will ye? We got some turrible good king apples—and maybe if the ol' woman's back's turned I might sneak down-cellar'n see what I could fild—gosh, I usu'ly can put my hand on somethin'—don't believe Sheriff Osgood's beat me to it this year, neither."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A PIECE IN THE PAPER.

**M**R. EDWARD CHESTERTON FRENCH sat in his office of president of the Sands County Trust and Savings Company, leisurely perusing the *Templeton Morning Breeze*.

"Hello!" he remarked aloud.

He read a second time the following paragraph:

We are informed on excellent authority that our well-known local financial institution, the Benson Bank, is enjoying an unprecedented era of prosperity. It is reported that a very heavy increase in deposits has taken place this autumn, and that the bank's outstanding loans have been heavily augmented, owing to unusually favorable crop conditions in our outlying districts.

But the news item which seems calculated to create a considerable stir is the announcement that President Joseph Benson and Mrs. Benson are planning an extended trip around the world, necessitating an absence from our midst of the greater part of a year. During Mr. Benson's absence his duties will be assumed by his daughter, Miss Elizabeth Benson, whose election to the office of president, as well as chairman of the board, was con-

summed at the directors' meeting of the bank on Wednesday last. Miss Benson's many friends are extending congratulations in full confidence that her ability and efficiency are fully equal to the requirements of her new position.

Mr. Edward Chesterton French dropped his feet to the floor. Then he lighted a cigarette and flipped the match into the fireplace, after which he went and stood by

the window, from which he could look diagonally across the street at the granite front of Benson's Bank. He blew several tenuous clouds of smoke in the general direction of the rival institution. Then he remarked:

"Well, the little snipe! Now *wouldn't* that *bump* you!"

After this he rang for his stenographer and fell busily, not to say fiercely, upon his morning's dictation.

**THE END.**



## **IMMORTAL FRAUDS** WHEN EARS WERE THE NEMESIS OF A RULER

**By CAPTAIN HORATIO WRAGGE**

**S**MERDIS, the impostor who succeeded in ascending the throne of Persia in the sixth century before the Christian era, had the misfortune to be mutilated by order of Cyrus, founder of the empire. His ears were cut off because he told a lie to the king.

Smerdis took good care after that to wear his hair in a fashion that concealed his misfortune. He had a powerful brother at court named Patizeithes, and between Smerdis and Patizeithes there existed the warmest affection. Smerdis became very timid and retiring because he felt that everybody knew his ears had been cut off. Patizeithes, who was a Magian, well versed in every kind of black art, assured the shy Smerdis that his mutilation would be avenged.

This Magian Patizeithes was as insinuating as he was cunning. In no very long time he had wormed his way into the complete confidence of Cambyses, who ruled Persia with firmness and ability. So fully did the ruler of Persia trust the Magian, that when Cambyses left his country on his famous expedition into Egypt he left Patizeithes behind at Susa, the capital, in charge of his palace and his treasures.

"At last," cried the Magian to his earless brother, "you will be avenged."

Smerdis could not imagine how this retribution would be exacted until Patizeithes explained a plan he had formed.

"I will place you upon the throne of Persia."

Smerdis, whose nature was timid, did not fall in readily with the idea. Patizeithes pointed out that the brother of the king not only bore a striking personal resemblance to Smerdis but had also the same name. This true Smerdis was with his brother Cambyses in Egypt, but he was soon after sent back to Susa because he alone could draw a bow that came into camp in some queer fashion. There are hints that this was part of the great treachery planned by the brother of the Smerdis who had no ears.

At any rate, there were now two men named Smerdis in the grand palace at Susa, where Patizeithes was in control and it became necessary to get that one of them who was the king's brother out of the way. The thing was done by Patizeithes through the medium of a rogue in his pay. This rogue was in Egypt with Cambyses, waiting for one of the king's inevitable dreams to be interpreted.

### ***The Wrong Man in the Right Place.***

In due time King Cambyses had one of his regular dreams—no man before or since had such remarkable dreams—and the rogue in the pay of Patizeithes made it mean that his brother wanted to usurp the throne. Cambyses immediately sent a confidential servant of his back to the capital of Susa with orders to slay his own brother Smerdis. Patizeithes pretended not to know what it all meant, but he hid behind a curtain and witnessed the slaughter of the king's brother, Smerdis. The body was taken by night to a garden and there buried, but Patizeithes did not so much as hint that he was aware of the proceedings. He introduced his brother, the false Smerdis, into the dead man's apartments and told him to get ready for the part of impostor.

The great Persian nobles had grown more and more disgusted with the tyranny of Cambyses



and not knowing that his brother Smerdis was dead and buried they resolved to make him king. The artful Patizeithes pretended to fall in reluctantly with this plan. They all burst together into the apartments reserved for the false Smerdis and proclaimed him sovereign of Persia then and there. The impostor accepted the crown, and as he took good care to hide his ears under his long hair, his personal mutilation was not noticed in the excitement. The deception was facilitated by the unexpected death of Cambyzes, who heard of the imposture while he was in Syria and, mounting his horse to march against the false Smerdis, died of a mysterious wound, received nobody quite knew how. In his last agony Cambyzes assembled his courtiers, told them that he had ordered his brother Smerdis slain and that the person claiming to be his successor at Susa was obviously a deceiver.

Nevertheless, all went well for the time being, especially as the man sent to slay the king's brother denied having ever committed any such crime. The impostor Smerdis was left in peaceful possession of the throne of Persia, which he held with the aid of his artful brother, Patizeithes, for seven happy months. Yet everybody about the court of Susa noticed that the new king did not show himself in public. Neither did he invite any of the nobles to the palace except on imperative occasions of ceremony. It was further observed that he wore his hair in a peculiar style.

### *Could Foretell Coming Events With Accuracy.*

All this seemed very queer, especially to the ladies of the late king's harem, most of whom had been transferred to the new king as his wives. Among these was Phaedima, a beautiful blonde, who was said to possess, in addition to an exquisite figure and a perfect face, gifts of divination so extraordinary that she could foretell coming events with absolute accuracy. She was the daughter of a noble then powerful at court, and her education was finished for the period in which she lived. She told her father of her suspicions. She did not trust Patizeithes. She remembered the other Smerdis and she had heard that his ears were cut off for lying. The father and his daughter agreed that the ears of the king must be tested in some way without delay. This was difficult because the false Smerdis was so careful about his hair.

At last the beautiful Phaedima took it into her head to beat her beautiful breasts, to fling her long tresses wildly and to dance the dance of death. This implied that something terrible was about to happen. Her powers of divination were well known to the ladies of the harem and they at once joined in her manifestations of woe. For a week the entire harem was in pandemonium and it became necessary for the cunning Patizeithes to find out what was the matter. The frantic Phaedima caused the eunuchs to be informed that she knew from a dream of a grave peril about to befall Smerdis—a peril she could communicate to his majesty only in the silence of the night and then in whispers.

For some little time the false Smerdis, cautioned by his brother, kept away from Phaedima. She had foreseen something of the kind and, in accordance with her plan, the father of this wonderful woman revealed to the other nobles of the court the nature of his suspicions. These were made known to both the false Smerdis and the artful Patizeithes. They agreed that it would be fatal to keep Phaedima away from her impostor husband any longer, but the certainty that she would seek access to his ears to whisper her mysterious secret made it necessary to play some trick. A pair of artificial ears could be contrived out of the fine clay in a neighboring field. They were molded and baked with infinite cunning and inserted in the empty orifices at each side of the impostor's head. He was provided with some extra ears of clay in case he met with any accident.

### *A King Who Was Utterly Without Feeling.*

Thus protected against discovery, the agitated Smerdis permitted the still more agitated Phaedima to come to his apartment in the darkness of the night. She lost little time in placing her arms about his neck and in pressing her lips to the side of his head. She was amazed to find an ear there, snugly hidden behind the hair. She moved her lips to the other side of his head and discovered the other ear of clay, but her movement had disarranged the king's hair. In accordance with the custom of the harem, she took the royal ear between her teeth to bite it playfully, whereupon a piece of the lobe came away in her mouth. It had broken.

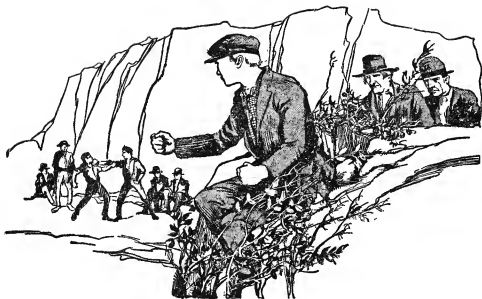
Saying nothing of her discovery, she put her lips to the other ear and bit away portions of that too. The king did not seem to know that part of his ear had been bitten off. She had plied him with wine.

In the morning, when Phaedima left the couch of the false Smerdis and had a talk with her father, she showed him the clay ear from the left side of the king's head. She had bitten it off piecemeal! It was easily put together and the nature of the imposture became evident. The father of the beautiful Phaedima and some other Persian nobles burst into the palace the next night and slew both the false Smerdis and his wily brother—B.C. 521—nor did the enraged courtiers go home until they had killed all the Magians in Susa.



## HOOKED. BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY

is a corking Complete Novelette, to appear in next week's issue.



# The Bird of Passage

By JOHN SCHOOLCRAFT

Author of "Let the Wedding Wait," etc.

## WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

"SPRINGTIME," a young wanderer, promises Bender, a dying pal, to take Johnny—a runaway youth—home. Johnny refuses to tell of his home town, as he loves tramp life. The Professor and Gahagan, two boes, plot to get Johnny away from Springtime, and seize the opportunity when Springtime jumps from the train to act as second for Roller, who is billed for a fight with Durkin, his side kick. Johnny, however, escapes and runs after Springtime. The Professor and Gahagan follow.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BALANCE OF FATE.

THE setting for the historical encounter between Roller and his one time pal was a quarry where the workmen had laid down their tools a quarter of a century before. It was a deep cleft in reddish brown rock, with several caverns up on the side where especially good pockets had been worked out. They were dry, roofed with boards taken from the sheds that had housed power plants, and they were open to the southern sun.

A quarter of century of hoboes had floored these caves with straw and fitted them up in every way—a complete assortment of pots and pans, kept spotlessly clean by the one or two old-timers who hung out in jungles for long spells at a time, filled a long shelf that ran across the end of the central and largest cavern. A spring which had broken out of the western wall had formed a pool at the bottom of the cliff—a pool big enough for washing and bathing—and a small barrel sunk into the rock above the pool collected water from the spring for drinking.

*This story began in the Argosy-Allatory Weekly for September 30.*

In the center of the quarry was a mound of pulverized rock, and on the apex of that mound was a cleared open ring about forty feet across where the outdoor community life of the place went on. Here Durkin sat with his back propped against a pile of railroad ties. He had a pipe in his mouth, which he pulled at in long, deep-throated puffs; his hands were clasped behind his head, and although the news had leaked through that Roller was coming with blood in his eye, Durkin was his usual calm, languid self.

Outside it was windy, but sunny, for the breeze had blown away the drizzle of the morning; within the quarry everything was as quiet as a tomb, and the warmth of the sun seemed to flow through the place in currents as bland as the Gulf Stream.

A small group came into the entrance of the quarry—Roller, with Springtime beside him, and a half dozen others who had caught the fight special at different points along its route. They walked forward gravely until within twenty feet of the group on the mound, who had turned with one accord to look at Durkin. Durkin looked up, saw the advancing group, tipped his hat forward to keep the sun out of his eyes, and went on with his smoking.

"There he is! There he is!" said Roller hoarsely, as he stripped off his coat and threw it to the ground. "The yellow snitcher! Tell him what I think of him, will you, Springtime? I ain't got the words for it."

Springtime walked to Durkin, trying for the sake of Roller to preserve the dignity of the occasion. Durkin looked up at him; his long, thin aristocratic face was unmoved, but in his steel gray eyes there was a faint point of light, and at sight of that Springtime felt that there was to be a fight worth seeing that day.

"Durkin," he said, "Roller figures you have done him one dirty trick by leaving him in jail with the idea that you were using your coin to go home on, and then spending it all on a drunk. He allows he's always split with you, and even when he was in jail he gave you a couple of dollars to get fruit with and a palm leaf fan. It's his idea that any guy who would do to him

what you did is a plain no-good guy and ought to have the tar beaten out of him."

Durkin took the stem out of his pipe and looked at the sun through it, and then blew into it to clear it of some obstruction. That calm action seemed to drive Roller into a frenzy; he snorted, and his face grew distinctly purplish in hue. Evidently it was impossible for the tall man to see the father of light through his pipe stem, and he began to hunt about him for a straw with which to clean it.

"Maybe so," he said. "Why doesn't he come over here and pass the time of day with me the way he ought to?"

"He figures," said Springtime, "that it's time he got a little of his own back, and he's waiting to take it out of your hide."

Durkin put his pipe in his pocket and got to his feet. There were certain signs of gentility about Durkin that every man not only noticed but respected: long hands, a quiet, inoffensive manner, a subtle humor, clean grammar, and his table manners, even in such a place as Snug Harbor, were perfect. He walked over to Roller and said pleasantly:

"If I've done anything to offend you, old chap—"

"There you go again!" roared Roller like a hoarse steam whistle. "Don't you 'old chap' me! Did I or did I not stake you when you were broke? Not once, but a dozen times."

"Yes," said Durkin mildly and looked around the crowd. "Show me the man that denies it."

There was a snicker which goaded Roller beyond the limit of human endurance. He bellowed, "Put up your dukes!" and waved in.

Up on the hillside the Professor and Gahagan cornered Johnny again. His manners told him that he should not interrupt Springtime when he was as deeply interested as he seemed to be, so instead of putting his elbow into his ribs, as Bender had advised, he climbed to a resting place on the side of the quarry, from which he could look down upon the ring in the middle and see what was going on. Gahagan got on one side of him and the Professor on the other, and the old man began it.

"Boy," he said, "we were going to tell you something when you pulled the merry-go-round on Gahagan. It ain't much of our business, but do you know where that guy is taking you?"

"No," said Johnny.

The Professor shook his head sadly, and Gahagan, taking his cue from the leader, shook his also.

"Damned if I can figure out what got into the old Bender!" said the Professor. "From what you've been telling me, I guess he must have been plumb crazy in some ways. Maybe that sickness of his sort of went to his head."

"Maybe," said Johnny as he looked from one to the other with wide eyes. "He sure acted queer the last time I saw him."

"You tell him, Gahagan, what we heard."

The big man stared so long that the Professor had to kick him to bring him into semblance of life.

"You tell him, Professor—you tell him. Honest, I ain't got the heart to do it."

"Well," said the old man, with pity thrilling through his voice, "he's taking you to a reform school."

Johnny jumped to his feet and his face became milk white. His head turned first from one to the other and back again, and he put his trembling hand on the Professor's forearm as if appealing for help.

"Reform schools are hell," said the old man as he shook his head. "I'd rather be in a regular pen—any day. You get better grub. I've been in both—leastways I've had friends that have—and they all say they'd choose the regular pen any time. When you're out you're marked; the bulls are after you, and after they see you shooting a snipe on the sidewalk they're onto you."

"Bender wouldn't send me to any ref," said Johnny shakily. "Bender liked me."

"It wasn't Bender. It's this guy Springtime down there. That night we stayed at the place with the old German we got him to talking and led him on and on until he told us he was taking you to a reform school. They'd give him a bounty for bringing you in. You know I always did reckon that Springtime was a bull or some

kind of a mouthpiece. He always has coin to burn, but where does he get it? He might be a truant officer, because the road is littered with runaway kids."

When he had finished, Johnny was going up a path bent over so that the hazel scrub would hide him. When he got to the top he ran like a rabbit into an open field. Casually the Professor followed—as casually as his excitement would let him—and a hundred yards behind him strolled Gahagan. They gained the top, and then they broke into a run after the fleeing Johnny.

The fight was running a curious course. Roller had dashed in with what seemed to be unbeatable impetuosity. His short, strong arms flew like flails, but at the end of three or four minutes he did not seem to have done much damage.

Durkin backed away before him and retreated in a wide circle. Blows aimed at the tall man's head landed on his shoulders; blows aimed at his body were caught between elbow and ribs and Roller had almost to put his foot against Durkin and pull before he could recover his fist.

Every blow was delivered with a grunt; Roller's face and neck were blue from frenzy. It was especially bad when Durkin caught a fist between his elbow and his ribs, for then he would put out one long arm against Roller's other shoulder and turn him away so that the free arm was practically useless. Then Roller raved like a mad dog, or like an apoplectic porpoise; he coughed and snorted and blew. At last he forgot the eminent Marquis of Queensbury and all his rules, for when Durkin had him stopped that way he lashed out with his foot toward the tall man's knee cap.

"Now, you're going too damned far!" exclaimed Durkin, and, stepping back, swung his right against Roller's chin. The blow did not seem to be a very hard one, but Roller's eyes became glassy, and, throwing up his arms, he collapsed at the feet of the man out of whose hide he had planned to take the ill treatment of many years.

When Durkin saw him in that pitiable position he went to the pool and, filling his hat, spilled water on the face of Roller

until he began to roll his eyes and show some signs of life. In that crowd that watched there was complete silence, for no one knew just how Durkin would take a laugh.

The situation was funny enough—a man could laugh twice a day the rest of his life and still not exhaust all the possibilities of that episode. Springtime assisted in the resuscitation of his principal.

When Roller was clear-headed enough to see who it was that was directing the first aid he struggled to a sitting position and groaned.

"All my life I've been taking stuff from that guy that no man would take from anybody. All my life you've been slipping things over on me that would make an angel cry. Ain't there going to be an end? I work, and you spend the coin, and I put in a month on a rock pile so that you can ride home in style, and then you get stewed. Oh, my Gawd!"

"I'm heading west," said Durkin in a matter-of-fact voice. "Come along. There is a fast freight in a quarter of an hour."

"So help me!" swore Roller, with a terrible oath. "I wouldn't go to a dog fight with you!"

"I'm not asking you to. I'm asking you to head west with me. You don't suppose I have been hanging around here just to give you a chance to thrash me, do you? Come, stir your stumps, old chap—it 'll be cold weather in a few weeks, and we've got to get settled in California."

Roller sat in an abyss of bitterness, for something stronger than he was bound to Durkin, and he knew that he would follow in spite of shame and in spite of the laughter that would go after him all the rest of his life. There was a movement in the ring about him and he sprang to his feet and glared about—ready to pulverize the first man who laughed, but wherever he looked there was ministerial solemnity and nothing else.

Durkin walked to the entrance of the quarry and waited. Roller stooped to pick up his coat, and Springtime handed him his hat. Then, step by step, the vanquished man went toward the quarry entrance, where his fate, in the shape of Durkin,

waited for him. At the entrance Durkin whispered a question and that question apparently had to do with money, for Roller put his hand into the inner pocket of his coat. He drew it out again with a bull-like roar.

"Durk, I've been rolled! There was over five dollars in my coat and some dip got away with it while I was fighting!"

The circle that faced him was as devoid of expression as the most inscrutable sphinx that ever propounded a riddle. Durkin put his arm through Roller's and led him away.

"I say, old chap," he said. "It's rather hard having to live with a bird-head all my life!"

For some time after the two had disappeared, Springtime stood looking at the entrance. Finally he drew a long breath and said: "Can you beat that!"

"You can't," opined the man next him; "no, sir, not with five aces."

Then Springtime sat down and laughed until he was weak. There was something in the whole affair that tickled him right down to his boots. It was one of those sudden turns of fortune, one of those glimpses into the hidden springs of human nature. For a half second he had seen fate's mysterious engines at their work; such dramatic comedy he could never have seen anywhere but on the road which he loved as some men love the sea.

After the departure of Roller and Durkin came a card game—a game broken by periods of Homeric mirth in which one player or another would slap down his cards and burst into a roar as he recalled some especially choice bit of the fight. The impetus of Roller's fiasco started just after the gust of merriment that Springtime was to remember all his life; it was warm, and the basin quivered with gilden light. So the day wore away—one of the best that Springtime had ever spent, for it was this sort of thing that bound him to the wanderer's life. Then some one asked: "Which way you heading, Springtime?"

At the question he grew cold from head to foot, for Johnny came into his mind, and he had a premonition of disaster. Without answering he got to his feet and circled the quarry, looking into all the caverns and

niches. He found no trace and cursed himself, for when he stopped to think, he could not be sure that Johnny had left the train when he did. A few cautious inquiries settled that point; Johnny had been seen, sitting on the hillside and watching the fight along with Gahagan and the Professor.

Next he combed the village as well as he could, walked up the one street and down a dozen times, looked into the movie, hung about the hotel for an hour, and then came back to the quarry, ashamed of his seive-like brain. Instead of bunking in the cavern he dozed by the fire, thinking that the lad might turn up in the night, and in the long dark hours he saw certain conclusions looming ahead of him which he chose to ignore. One was that he was a worthless hobo, who could not keep a promise to an old man, and the other was that if Johnny had got away, the Professor and Gahagan were somehow mixed in it.

So he dozed and sat awake alternately until dawn, when a stirring by the fire brought him to his feet. He stamped to get the warmth into his legs and nodded to a negro who was kneeling by the fire and propping a can among the embers. Springtime nodded to the newcomer and said: "What's the dope?"

"Bad," said the black man as he rolled his eyes; "bad."

"Yeah?" said Springtime, and awaited something amusing."

"I've seen one bad sight. I've seen a cohpsie up the line with a seegah stuck so fast in his mouth it had to be pried out with a chisel!"

Like a flash of searing light it came over Springtime just who it was that the black man had seen.

"God!" he said. "Not Bender!"

"Yas, suh," returned the black man as he drew away from Springtime at this exhibition of supernatural knowledge, "that was him. An ole acrobat that used to travel aroun' with a lil boy. Sho, it was him. I I come into a bahn lookin' foh a place to kip, and I didn't have no matches, and I blundahed into a lil room and laid me down. I felt somebody right then next to me and I said: 'Scuse me,' and moved ovah. He didn't say nothin' and shoh I knowed

he was daid! I crope out and got a light off 'um the fiah and come back and shoh enough there he was—daid with that seegah struck between his teeth.

"I didn't stop none—I lighted out and I woke up that jungle with yellin' and they sent somebody along to town. 'Long about daylight out comes a doctah and a man with the ambulance, and the doctah looks at the cohpsie and says: 'I knowed him—his name's Bendah, and I tole him not to smoke no seegahs. Killed hisself smoking that black seegah! They took him away, an' I've been travelin' blind to git away from theah! Oh, Lawd!'"

Two hours later Springtime was ten miles from the quarry. He knew as clearly as he knew his own name that Bender had killed himself intentionally, wiped himself out because, without Johnny, life for him was not worth living. And in that flash he saw, too, that Gahagan and the Professor were responsible for the boy's disappearance; every word and flattering look which they had cast at the boy became suddenly significant.

Which way they had gone he could not tell; it was only by casting rings around the quarry that he could pick up the trail. There would be no trouble with the Professor once they met; but there was every reason to think that Gahagan would put up a fight. It would be a good fight, with a fair chance of permanent crippling, or even death, in it for himself, but it had been Bender's dream that the boy should go straight.

Springtime, the easy going, the man who had been everybody's friend, felt himself becoming hard as steel.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SPRINGTIME'S GAG.

**L**UCKILY for his good intentions, he found a hot trail. The boy was so conspicuous that it was easy to follow him—so easy that he ran past the three twice. The Professor, like the old fox that he was, was doubling on his own tracks, for he had not yet made up his mind as to just which career he would start Johnny on first. When he talked to the lad about go-

ing to Mexico he was romancing; he had no more intention of going to that poverty-ridden country than he had of going to Labrador.

York was the place for Johnny—or Chi, but there were certain obstacles to be overcome, chiefly that of finding the right person to educate the boy. When he found himself with the lad in his possession the old man had announced that they would at once strike for York, but two detectives took a man out of a lodging house under the very eyes of the Professor, and the sight of that threw him into such a panic that he renounced at once the idea of going in person to the great metropolis. Instead he would wait until he ran across the right sort of a man, and in the meantime there were still some late county fairs running and still some money to be made in the carnival business.

In exactly one week after he had lost the boy, Springtime ran upon a scent so warm that he could stop for a half day and figure out a plan of campaign. The three had traveled in a circle, so that at the end of that week, they were within thirty miles of Snug Harbor. Gahagan was at his old trick of wrestling; Springtime's informant had seen him, and had also seen the old man, but did not know just what his graft was aside from ballyhooing for the wrestling.

The effort of keeping his mind on the chase had made Springtime morose and thin. He watched himself like a hawk, and whenever he found his attention wandering, he scourged himself as a medieval saint might have done. But always at the end of such a painful session, he registered a solemn vow that if he were successful in this quest never, never again would he undertake anything that had the slightest shade of responsibility attached to it. The rest of his life he would drift like a piece of seaweed.

In the late morning of a Saturday he landed in the county seat, where Gahagan was performing. There was a fair at the grounds, and although, after he had pondered a half hour, Springtime had found no better plan of operation than to march up to the two and demand Johnny, he set out for the park at once. In his journey

through the city, the name of which he found was Napoleon, he kept to the back streets and alleys, so that there would be no embarrassing encounters with constables, who at this joyous season, would be on the alert for any hangers-on whom they might "shake down." And as he marched up an alley that ran between substantial houses, he stopped with his head up, as dead still as a pointer scenting birds.

A smell had reached him—a delicious smell, a combination of fruits and spice and hot pastry. It was that delicious aroma which has no equal the world over, the smell of mince pies just out of the oven. Cautiously the wanderer looked about to locate the game and saw it sitting on the window sill of a respectable house which he had just passed. The pies were cooling on the window sill, tipped slightly outward, so that he could see the delicate brown of the crust and the little pine trees pricked into them to allow the steam to escape.

Springtime ran his eye over the place with his instinct sharpened to needle fineness. He wanted some of that pie more than he had ever wanted food in his life. It was a rather old-fashioned place, painted bright yellow, with white trim and much lacy woodwork up in the eaves. He noted that the paint was fresh, that the heavy clumps of shrubbery in the corners of the big yard had been pruned recently, that the lawn and paths were geometrically correct and unbelievably neat, and that the fence was as straight as a taut cord without a missing or a broken picket.

Spotlessly clean windows, plus this other evidence, told him that it would be a very hard house to work. But he had not eaten a single real meal since he had set out on the trail of the abductors and he needed a bodyful of nourishing food before he went up against the wrestler. What little money he had he must save, so that in case he was injured he would have something to live on while recovering. No matter what form the fight took, it was sure to be a hard one, and even if he were beaten it would be better to go down with a full stomach than an empty one.

If Springtime had a reputation for anything, above his remarkable ability to cover

territory, it was for nerve. That impudence which is the special quality of the American vagabond was strong in him, and so far it had kept him well fed, well clothed, and to a certain extent, in money. Just now he had a tremendous yearning to put his feet under a table and eat.

"*Te morituri salutamus!*" the Roman gladiators used to say as they saluted the emperor before their combats—"We who are about to die, salute thee!" It is probable that before they entered the arena, they filled themselves with as much good food as prudence would allow at the little shops near the Coliseum. Something of that feeling, plus the sportsman's delight in cracking a hard nut, came over Springtime, and in order to continue his inspection of the house without arousing suspicion he took a bit of paper from his pocket, and under cover of a pretense at reading it, took another survey of the place.

There was a flash of white in one corner of the lawn behind a syringa clump and he heard the cluck and squawk of some sort of fowl there. He could see that the figure was that of a woman, but from where he stood she looked a bit thin, and it was a part of his philosophy not to ask favors of any thin woman. If a man wanted to be really well fed, he should stick to houses run by plump, middle-aged blondes.

He waited as long as he decently could for the figure to come out into the open, but it seemed to sink farther and farther out of sight behind the syringa, and he had to move along. Ahead of him was a small watering trough standing opposite a gray stable, and Springtime guessed at once that this stable did not belong to the yellow house, but to one of the same slate color farther down the street. He looked down at himself and found that his tweed suit showed the effects of hard travel, and that although he had scrubbed himself in the early morning his hands were grimy, and he suspected that there were blotches of soot on his face.

Padding noiselessly up to the watering trough, he stripped off his coat, intending to wash, but had not put his hands into the cool, brown water, when behind him he heard the steady drawing of heavy breath.

He turned about and saw a globular, middle-aged man sitting in an old swivel chair which was tipped against the stable wall. The man was asleep; his smooth jowl, which showed just a stubble of gray beard, rested comfortably on a linen duster, and his whalelike front rose and fell like a gentle surf as he slept.

A crumbling brown straw hat was tipped far forward over a pugnacious brow; one plump hand rested against his cheek; the other, adorned with a heavy seal ring and a currycomb, lay on his knee.

Springtime noted back of him a good automobile, a row of good harness hanging along the wall, which had been scrubbed until all the stitching showed white against the firm leather, and farther along the hind-quarters of a bay horse.

With a smile at this picture of a contented stableman, Springtime splashed water on his face and lathered his hands. He went over his collection of ghost stories, and they were good ones. There was the one about the sick sister, and the one about the long days in hospital, and even the deaf and dumb gag which he could work better than any man on the road. There was also the one of going to a door and asking for as much food as one could buy for five cents. This display of willingness to pay always brought a splendid response. But here he felt something different was needed, something Homeric. Everything demanded that he originate a new one: the hardness of the house, the mince pies, and Gahagan looming like fate in the background.

Nothing had come into his mind when he had finished scrubbing his face and hands; then a new angle developed as he heard a yawn behind him, and the loose legs of the swivel chair rattled against the floor of the stable. Springtime turned affably and saw the stableman staring at him out of a pair of small brown eyes in which there was more than a dash of shrewdness.

Springtime nodded and said: "Let's see—does Mr. Clark still live in that yellow house?"

The answer was prompt, but not abrupt. "No, he don't."

"Who has it now?"

"Folks by the name of Osborne."



"Osborne," said Springtime, wrinkling his brows in an effort at memory. "Newcomers, aren't they?"

"Yes. They've been there only thirty years."

Springtime laughed, but became wary. The stableman's face did not change a trifle, although the twinkling points of light in the eyes deepened. There was more to this man than met the eye, and under cover of brushing his shoes he inspected him carefully again, this time taking in the unpressed trousers and the big brass watch chain which had been uncovered by his change of position. At the end of that perusal he felt that the old boy was still all right, for there was a horsey look about him. The pad saddles on the wall announced that the owner of that bay horse dealt in running horses and not trotting horses, and it is notorious that running horses break down all distinctions. If there had been a sulky in the stable Springtime would never have made his next move.

"I've got to get some dope on the folks there," he said with his frankest smile. "Who's the lady in the side yard?"

"I can't see from here."

"I'm guessing she's the lady of the house."

"Just why?"

"I don't know—it's my hunch."

The stableman swung one knee over the other and settled back.

"Was she feeding a wild goose?" he asked.

"She was feeding some kind of a fowl. I heard it making some sort of racket."

"Well, that is the lady of the house—Mrs. Osborne. She has three daughters—Lou, Maude and Kitty. Lou has just gone back for her last year in college, and Maude has gone for her first. Kitty is still at home. They've lived in that place for a number of years, and it was at one time a sort of boarding house—hotel for good traveling men. That was before Tom Osborne struck it rich. Not a traveler in there for the last five years, though."

"Thanks," said Springtime warmly. The old boy had come through better than he had ever expected he would. His plan of campaign was immediately clear to him.

He would go and lay claim to being one of the men who, at some distant point in the past, had stopped there. If worst came to worst, he could claim to be out of luck or something like that.

He took out his kit of thin brushes and went over his clothes carefully, and rapped the dust out of his cap against the fence. A fresh necktie, which he carried in an inner pocket, smartened things up wonderfully, as did a little wetting and brushing of his hair. When he had done he looked at himself in his mirror—a bit of plate-set in a wooden frame—and he had to admit that the effect was not bad. Probably it was going to be easy, for any woman who would take care of a wild goose could not be altogether flinty-hearted.

All of this had not taken five minutes, and he was putting on his coat when the old man spoke up again, and at the words Springtime whirled as though he had been stabbed in the back.

"I won't do you any good."

"What won't?"

"Don't try to be foxy with me, my boy. Don't you suppose I can lamp 'em?"

Springtime stared hard and then surrendered.

"There's no harm in taking a chance," he said, "and my mouth sure waters for some of that pie on the window sill. I never did see such a pair of beauties."

"Then you'd better grab one and beat it. She wouldn't feed you if you went up there on your hands and knees. She's death on panhandlers; anybody that batters her door is sure in for a hard time. Take it from me, boy, she's got charity, but she's got charity for things that don't need it—Fiji Islanders and wild geese."

Springtime stared while these words fell like hammers. The old chap still looked horsey, but he was not quite so dull as his stocky figure would lead one to believe. But his eyes were friendly, and there was just a touch of bitterness in his words that led Springtime to believe that he was an ally.

"She can't do any more than refuse."

"Oh, can't she? Ever heard of Slim McCabe? I thought that would get to you. He's worse than Jeff Carr ever thought of

being, and I've seen 'em both in action. Slim hits with anything from a paving stone to a lamp post, and he hits first and asks questions afterward. And he has an eye for 'em—better'n mine, and I saw through you. You sure have a front, though, and if it hadn't been for all that kit you would have fooled me. Not Slim, though. He'd have known you."

The name of Slim McCabe had sent a cold thrill through the wanderer, and prudence whispered to him to run down that alley as fast as he could go, and get out of Slim McCabe's town. All over the country that constable was known as being "hard-boiled," but that hardly expressed it. He was parboiled. Tramps talked about him with bated breaths in hangouts that stretched from San Diego to Bangor and from Key West to Puget Sound. They told bloody stories of his manhandling, and when they went through Slim McCabe's town, no matter in what force, they went with numbed virility, in the middle of the night.

"Gosh!" said Springtime. "I've got to get a big feed somewhere. I'd sure like to have one good meal before I'm done for. To-morrow there may not be enough left of me to make any difference, and, man, when I saw those pies on the window sill, something told me that just about three-quarters of one of them was mine."

"What's up?" said the old man, sitting bolt upright. "Are you going to fight somewhere around here?"

"I'll tell a man!"

"Boxing?"

Springtime shook his head.

"Maybe you're going to wrestle that big fellow at the fair. He'd tear you limb from limb."

"No bulletins," said Springtime, shaking his head again. "It's going to be a stand-up and knock-down fight, with nothing barred."

"Well," said the stableman, as he rasped a hand across his chin, "there's no harm in trying, and maybe you have a gag that will work. But don't go to the back door, whatever you do—walk right up to the front as if you were mayor of the town or a visiting minister, and brace her. If you go

to the back door you're done for; and if you get away with this you'll have something to brag about the rest of your days. Here, I have the hunch.

"Tom Osborne is away for the rest of the day, and he has a lot of queer pals that his wife has never seen. Tell her you have an appointment to see him, and she'll ask you to wait, of course, but watch your table manners. She'll ask you to stay to dinner, and once you have the grub I leave the rest to you."

Springtime looked for a long minute into the small brown eyes, but they were bland and honest, and he felt that the man wished him well.

"You're sure," he said, "that the man won't come back? It would be hell if he should drop in while I was at the table, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, he won't be back. You won't take a chance on that."

"Thanks," said Springtime, drawing a long breath. "That's better."

He walked along the alley until he came to the neat gate that led into the yard. Before opening it he had a momentary qualm, but once inside that disappeared, and he stepped across the lawn with perfect assurance.

Some people have a sensitive area between the shoulder blades which announces forthcoming changes in weather, and Springtime had such an area in his mind. That sixth sense had often told him that things apparently serene contained the seed of future troubles, and more than once that instinct had saved him, but as he walked across the lawn he was sure that all was as it should be.

"Good morning, Mrs. Osborne," he said as he rounded the syringa clump, and took off his cap; but the figure that stepped out into the opening was not the one he had been constructing in his mind. It was young, slim, and the eyes, instead of being light blue, were a curious deep reddish brown, with tiny flecks of lighter color in them. It wore sport shoes of white buckskin, foxed and saddled in brown, white stockings over slim ankles, a white skirt of some coarsely woven white material, a golden colored sweater. At the open throat

there was a touch of gold ribbon, and just another touch in the misty, reddish brown hair, which, in defiance of the laws of fashion, did not cover the ears, but was wound about the head in a loose coil.

Springtime, as the deep clear eyes, which seemed faintly veiled with melancholy, looked directly into his, felt the blood beating in his face. The girl carried a hammer and a piece of chicken wire, and evidently had been engaged in enlarging the pen of a big wild goose, who twined his neck about the bars of a V-shaped coop and hissed at the interloper. Springtime's intelligence told him that he had an excellent opportunity in offering to carry on with that bit of work, but he was paralyzed.

Then the girl smiled fleetingly and pointed to a spot behind Springtime, and, turning, the wanderer saw the woman he had created just as he had imagined her—plump, middle-aged, with near-sighted blue eyes behind nose glasses. It pleased him to think that, with nothing to work on but the simple fact that the woman was tending a wild goose, he had reconstructed her so accurately, just as the scientist will deduce the whole skeleton of a brontosaurus from one knuckle joint. That gave him a feeling of confidence, and the blood ran back out of his face, and he repeated his greeting. She returned it, adjusted her glasses, looked at him as hard as good manners would permit, and he could see her asking her daughter in silent pantomime who the stranger could be.

"That's a beautiful goose," said Springtime. "I've never seen a finer one. Where did you get him—raise him yourself? He's new since I was here last."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mrs. Osborne said, "Isn't he handsome?" and stopped to look into the creature's round eye as a mother stoops over a cradle to look at her baby. That movement showed him that he was past the hardest part—for it recognized him as some one she ought to know. She would keep him now until she found out who he was, and it was his intention to withhold that interesting information until doom cracked.

She straightened, and Springtime could see that while she struggled with the prob-

lem of his identity, she was blaming herself for bad eyesight and probably a bad memory for faces.

"No," she said, in answer to the second part of his question, "we didn't raise him—Mr. Osborne shot him a year ago. He broke a wing, and then brought the dear home to fatten him for New Year's; but when that time came around we were all so attached to Archie that we could not bear to kill him.

"We have been taking care of him ever since, and when the first flock of wild geese go over on their way south I shall open his cage and let him go. He's been such a pet, but I wouldn't think of keeping one of nature's children penned up against its will, would you?"

"Oh, no," said Springtime. His eye caught that of the girl, and he was not sure, but he thought that deep within the brown eyes he saw just a glint of a feeling—a feeling that the wild goose was not equally dear to all the members of the Osborne household.

"Is Tom around?" asked Springtime casually. "He told me to drop in this morning and he would see me about some horses. He's a hard man to find."

"No," said Mrs. Osborne, and the tramp could see that on the one hand she was relieved at knowing his status and that on the other hand she was just a bit hostile, as all good wives are, to an unknown friend of the other partner. "I don't think he will be back until four o'clock, although it may be sooner."

Springtime's regret was perfect. He had to see Osborne about something very important to himself—his time was limited—he *could* wait until about two o'clock, in the hope that the man would turn up—and while he did not like to bother them with a guest for dinner, he yielded to their entreaties to stay simply because he did not wish to waste his time in coming to Napoleon.

So it ended with Kitty's going into the house to see that another place was laid, while Springtime strolled toward the house with Mrs. Osborne. At the foot of the steps he struck for the magazine—the blow that would settle everything.

"I've heard all about your daughters from Tom," he said. "Lou must be just about through college by now."

At his words Mrs. Osborne's face lighted up. "Oh, yes! This is her last year, and she has been doing splendidly. She is president of her class, and has been chosen chairwoman of a committee which has to give a report on international relations. I'm really proud of my little Lou!"

"That's fine," said Springtime, who had the feeling of the artist when he puts in the one stroke of the brush that makes him immortal. "And Maude, I take it, is just about ready to go, too."

"She's there already. So far she has nothing to report except that Lou saw to it that she has a nice room and a pleasant roommate."

"And Kitty," said Springtime, with a nod in the direction of the house—"will she be going?"

"No. My little Kitty is staying home to keep the old place alive. Luckily for her father, she doesn't want to go. She would rather go to a horse race with her father, I really believe, than the best school on earth."

"That's fine for Tom," said Springtime. "He certainly thinks plenty of her."

All in all, it was a masterpiece, and Springtime had the right to be proud of it. This was a gag which would make any man famous from coast to coast. But, no, he could not tell it, except to Durkin. Durkin was the only one who could taste the real bouquet of it—the wild goose, the stableman, the mince pie, and all. Some time when he and Durkin were lying on the sunny lip of a cut waiting for the noon freight to pull up a long grade, he would tell him, and between them they would roll in the soft grass and have a laugh that would be worth all the trouble he had been through and was going through with Johnny.

Not only was all well, but all could not possibly be better. In the middle of the table was a ham—a flat, tender one, stuck with cloves and flanked by a white mountain of mashed potatoes on one side and a green mountain of spinach on the other. He ate as comfortably as if he had been con-

suming his share of Mulligan in Snug Harbor, chatted with Mrs. Osborne, but said nothing to Kitty, who seemed to be the quietest of her sex he had ever known.

Thus far he had heard her say nothing. Perhaps she was the sort that spoke seldom, but when she did speak he was sure that she said a mouthful. He was acutely conscious of her presence on his left; out of the corner of his eye he could see the delicate hands and slim, golden forearms moving over the tablecloth. On one finger was a dull gold ring with a bloodstone in it. Bloodstone—he had heard the Professor say that that was the birthstone for some month, but he could not remember which. It seemed as though the sun were shining on him from Kitty's side, even though she said nothing, while on her mother's side the weather, while fairly pleasant, had a hint of frost in it.

When it came to the pie he was happy, for he had got what he started out to get; and that is about as keen a satisfaction as there is in life, no matter what the quest may be. One is sometimes puzzled by the fact that the loss of a bridge game puts a millionaire in a worse humor than the loss of a tenth of his fortune.

But fortune builds up only to destroy. With the second bit of his second piece of pie on his fork, Springtime heard a door slam, and after it a heavy footfall. Kitty Osborne spoke for the first time, and, as he had thought, when she did say something it was loaded with significance. "There's dad now."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RETORT COURTEOUS.

**S**PRINGTIME felt a cold wave running from his feet to his head. Mrs. Osborne laughed her throaty, cultivated laugh as though she were counting "one, two, three," and so on up to ten.

"Well, I am glad," she said, "that you will not have to wait any longer." Under which Springtime read the meaning: "Now we shall know who this puzzling stranger is."

Under the circumstances there was just

one thing to do. Perhaps in a different place, he would have stuck it out, but in Slim McCabe's town, with the heavy foot-step drawing nearer and nearer, and a beautiful girl to see one's discomfiture, there was just one sensible thing to do—run. All this went through Springtime with the speed of light, so that within ten seconds after the door slammed he was on his feet and had taken a half dozen long steps toward the hall. He would seize his cap; maybe he would have to run without it, but at any rate as soon as he was in the open he would sprint, and would be far away before they could ever get word to Slim McCabe. It was too bad, in a way, and never would he be able to retail this story at all, not even to Durkin, for instead of being glorious comedy it was turning into tragedy.

Two more steps brought him to the door, and there he stopped, face to face with the man of the stable. His face was an expressionless mask; for ten seconds he kept the young man on the rack, and then he put out his hand and said, "Hello, Jack. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

The net of fine wrinkles about the eyes and the twinkle in them told the tramp that the old man was an ally, and that he need not fear, but all the same he was powerless to move, and Osborne had to wheel him about and lead him back to the table.

Springtime sat down, and saw, after a moment, that his movement had created no surprise at the table, for he had kept his napkin in his hand, and that sudden break could be interpreted as the desire of a friend to greet another friend. He gathered himself and mumbled something, but within he felt sick and hollow. Mince pie was not worth such shocks as these. Osborne sat down and helped himself liberally, and after he had taken away the edge of hunger he began to play with his mouse.

"How's everything at Wheatvale?" he said, and his face was as innocent as a baby's.

"All right."

"Wheatvale?" said Kitty, speaking for the second time. "Where's that?"

"You tell 'em, Jack," said Osborne. "You know how to get there a lot better than I do."

"It's a little town north of here," returned Springtime, and his voice sounded empty and false to itself.

"Odd," said Mrs. Osborne, with that cultivated laugh that gave the tramp goose-flesh all up and down his spine, "but I don't remember hearing any one speak of Wheatvale."

Silence settled like a wet blanket. Osborne did not mind it, or Kitty, who asked desultory questions about the county fair, but to Springtime it was barbed torture. He sat and looked down in his plate, not daring to move his hands for fear of upsetting something.

"How's Harper?" asked Osborne, after a space of time which to the wanderer could have been anything from a split second to a half century. Springtime glanced across and saw that this question had been addressed to him for the purpose of mere torture, and he felt a sudden flare of anger. If it had not been for Kitty he would have done something—just what he did not know, but he would not have sat there like a wooden statue and let the old man stick him full of knives.

"He's well," he answered, glaring into the little brown eyes, "and so is Gene Jackson." A flicker told him that this last had registered.

"Poor old Gene," answered the stableman. "He's had a hard time of it."

"Sure he has. Nobody knows what that man has been through."

In the silence that followed Springtime yearned for Gabagan, who was bad enough. In fact, he would be torture, but it was the kind of torture that one could understand—just the twisting of an arm out of its socket or something like that. But Osborne was not through.

"What's the news of Corb and his wife?" he demanded; and this time his victim struck back.

He forced a mysterious smile.

"Corb could be arrested for what he thinks of you," he said. "He allows that the next time you come around he'll be filling you full of birdshot."

Osborne coughed over his coffee cup—a distinctly cool wind sprang up on his east side, but on his west he heard a smothered

chuckle from Kitty. It was a fair hit, and Springtime knew that he would be troubled no more in that quarter.

Mrs. Osborne laughed her "one, two, three," up to six this time, and said: "It is extremely curious, but I seem to be the only person here who is not intimately acquainted with this set of unfortunates. I have never heard such a roll call of misery, and I don't recognize a single one. Just who are Gene and Harper and Corb's wife? Do you know any of them, daughter?"

"Sure she does," said Osborne. "She's met the lot of them when we were out hunting."

"And for the life of me," went on the lady of the house, now that the tailboard was down, so to speak, and the contents of the wagon littering the highway, "I can't place this gentleman here!"

Osborne put down his knife and fork, and said:

"Do you mean to say you don't know Jack Springer?"

His wife squinted at the tramp, who suffered more in that moment than in a night of travel on the pilot of a limited through a Wyoming blizzard; cutting the air for an express was cold work, but this was colder.

"No," she said. "I'm sorry. I have no memory for faces."

"Well, mother, you're sure getting on. He knows you, even if you don't know him. He knows you and Maude and Lou and Kitty. You remember Kitty, don't you, Jack? Of course you do—you saw her when you were here to dinner before."

Mrs. Osborne laughed just "one," and was silent, and the short remainder of the meal passed in quiet. Whatever other faults Tom Osborne had, he possessed one virtue that endeared him to his guest—that of eating quickly. Within ten minutes from the time he entered the door he was up again and biting at the end of a cigar. He put one hand under Springtime's elbow and steered him to the porch, and there the two faced one another over a door mat in which had been woven the word "Welcome."

"Nix on the fadeaway," said Osborne in a low voice, "or I'll have McCabe after

you. There's something I want to speak to you about."

Springtime gathered as much as he could of the old man's coat in his fist.

"You're a kind old gentleman, you are!" he said between his teeth. "You don't enjoy putting a man through the third degree, do you?"

"Nerve!" said Osborne in the same tone. "Of all the monumental gall I ever did see! You have the world stopped, my boy. You'd ask the copper for the loan of his night stick, and then lay him out with it. S-sh! Here comes Kitty. Watch your step—she might see through you."

He waved his hand toward a round mat at the top of the steps, and Springtime sat down and leaned back against the porch pillar, more exhausted than he would have been by a day's hard work. He lighted the cigar which Osborne had given him, and the first whiff told him that he had not put such a strong, rich piece of tobacco between his lips for years.

After a moment Kitty came out, and with a faint smile, which was at the same time friendly, sat down on the opposite mat and leaned against the other pillar. Mrs. Osborne passed between them with a few stalks of celery in her hand, and her look as she went down the steps was more defiant than anything else. The goose put out a long neck and made hungry noises at her approach, and Springtime, catching the deep glint in Kitty's eye, laughed. She echoed it, but it was short-lived merriment, for it is not loyal to laugh over the oddities of one member of the family with any one outside the clan, no matter how bronzed, straight, or handsome that stranger might be.

There really were two Kitty Osbornes—first the girl Kitty, twenty, pretty, loyal to her rather trying mother, the moral support of her father, a help in sickness. In spite of a faint feeling that she was getting too old for such things, she managed to drag herself to one dancing party a week. Then there was the Kitty who had done her best since babyhood to fill the place of the son which Tom Osborne should have had. That Kitty was much given to opening conversation with "Gee, dad," and "Say, old-timer."

That Kitty went to races and an occasional prize fight, rode the cranky thoroughbred Daisy to the queen's taste, and sometimes felt curiously out of place in a young woman's body. That Kitty loved Kipling and Service and all things dealing with gypsy trails, open roads, and calls of the wild.

At sight of Springtime she had felt an instant thrill of novelty; there was the tattooed anchor on the back of his hand, and he had what she liked to call "the look of eagles." At table she had been a silent but deeply interested listener to all that had passed between Springtime and her father; for she guessed that there was more there than met the eye, but her instinct told her that Tom Osborne, with his sudden likings and dislikings, had conceived a favorable opinion of the stranger.

For all these reasons when she sat down opposite Springtime and tilted her head back against a pillar she was all agog to know more about him.

Springtime had nothing to say, for he was going through a curious mental state brought on by the fatigue of the chase, a long time of comparative fasting broken by a marvelous meal—men can get drunk on food as well as liquor—and the powerful fragrance of a good cigar. At least he supposed that these were responsible for the fact that for the first time in his life he felt that restlessness leave him which had driven him back and forth across the continent like a leaf before a gale.

Looking into the pretty face opposite him, he was for the moment absolutely at peace, and as he gazed up the street the trees seemed greener and the lawns deeper and cooler than any he had ever seen. The smoke of his cigar was as keenly blue as a California beach sky, and for a full minute he sat without stirring a muscle, and in that minute felt that of all places in the world that particular spot was the one in which he could spend the rest of his days. It flashed on him that if anything were to happen to him in the fight with Gahagan, that this girl was the only person who would take care of Johnny, and who could do it.

Johnny would mind her. All that would

be necessary to learn where the boy lived would be one question from her, and the lad would "kick in." In case Gahagan laid him out he would get Johnny to her in one way or another, and she would see that he got back to his mother. So sure was he of her that he spoke his mind without another moment's consideration.

"If I sent a boy to you—a runaway kid, about fourteen—would you take care of him and see that he got home?"

To him the question did not seem strange, but it was a test of Kitty's dealings with mankind. The faint smile vanished from her face and she looked hard at him; for a half minute their glances clung while she plumbed his intent and found it good. Then she nodded.

"Yes," she answered, and almost whispered it.

Springtime sat up with a jolt, for Tom Osborne had come around the corner of the house. He was not so sure of Osborne, and the glance which he shot at Kitty warned her to be silent in the matter of the runaway boy. She comprehended and nodded. Osborne stopped for a moment to look at his wife as she pattered about the wild goose, and then spoke to Springtime.

"Get your hat and come along with me."

The wanderer went into the hall and found his cap, a bit unsteady on his feet from the cigar and the heady wine of Kitty's company. He said good-by to her with a significant look; she gave him a hard handshake, and he went around the corner of the house—suddenly steady, for the image of Gahagan jumped up ahead of him like the jinni out of the bottle. Osborne touched his guest on the shoulder and advised him to say good-by to the lady of the house.

Springtime did so, and by the time he got out of the yard his head was clear and his gorge rising at the thought of what Osborne had put him through.

"If it weren't for the fact that I have to keep out of jail, I'd have slammed you and run for it!"

"With a rind like yours," returned his host, "I'd be President of the United States. You would have slammed me, would you? You can put this in your pipe and

smoke it—I don't give food away to anybody. A man pays in one way or another for what he gets from me. I work hard for what I get, and I don't see myself throwing it away on the first man that happens to be hungry. Now where is this fight you were talking about?"

"It's a private fight."

"Don't you want a referee or something? I have a State license to referee boxing and wrestling."

Springtime looked at him and tried to penetrate to the soul of the man, but saw nothing of the small, brown eyes which had a quaint resemblance to Kitty's—in their color only, for in every other way they were exactly the opposite. The nearer Springtime got to Gahagan the weaker he felt—and while appealing to the law to rescue Johnny was against all his tramp instincts, and would ostracise him from hobo life the country over, still he might be forced to do that thing in order to succeed.

"I wonder," he said, "if a man could trust you? Would you double-cross me if I did let you in on this?"

"Man," said Osborne solemnly, "the meanest thing I ever did to a human being I just did to you. And you can't blame me for that, considering everything. You really came right along and asked for it, didn't you?"

"Maybe so," said Springtime thoughtfully—"maybe so. I'll tell you this much—it's at the fair grounds, and one of us is the big man who is wrestling out there."

"Gee!" said Osborne, and whistled. "He's twice as big as you."

"Three times," said Springtime, "and twice as ugly. That's why I had to get a good meal under my ribs. He'll be living high. But I've made up my mind—the more people I let into this, the more chance there is that it will go flop. Nix, neighbor; I can't let you in on this fight."

"But you'd let me have a peek at it," said Osborne. "You wouldn't deprive me of a look at a good fight, would you?"

Suddenly as the memory of his wrongs swept back over him, the memory of how the stableman had taken him, Springtime's anger rose and he whirled about and walked toward the end of the alley.

"I've had enough of you," he said over his shoulder. "All I have to do is to think of you, and I could lick the world!"

"Well, I hope you get cracked clean in two," said Osborne, and rubbed his chin as he watched the clean, compact figure as it moved toward the corner.

Like all men without sons, he was lonely. Kitty had done her best to fill the lack, and she could ride a horse better than any man in Napoleon and could talk intelligently about right hooks and the like; but he wanted a man to whom he could talk about the things that interested him. He was subject to strong attachments, as are many men, as strong and mysterious as first loves, and never in his long and varied life had he seen a young chap who took his eye as Springtime had done.

"There's a two-fisted lad," he said, and walked around the corner of the house to where Kitty, with her hands in her lap, sat with her head tilted back and stared at some mysterious thing in the sky. Her father stood on the bottom step and looked at her and slowly her gaze traveled down until it rested on him. Her father took her chin in his hand and shook her head gently from side to side.

Kitty was getting a glimpse of romance, and the thrill of it and the mystery caused her to voice an old complaint. "Dad, I wish I had been a man."

"Oh, my gosh! Your mother all over again. I never did see a woman who didn't figure that she ought to have been one. They all think that if nature hadn't played 'em such a mean trick they would have been Casars and Napoleons. If you hang around for a while we might see something exciting—some real life!"

"Where?"

"At the fair grounds. If we can find it, it ought to be good."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CHECKER TENT.

THERE had been some trouble with Gahagan over the change in plans, for the big man was for a quick turnover, and if he could have had his way



he would have put Johnny at work lifting leathers the day after they had got him. On that point the Professor showed a touch of reason—he knew that stealing was a fine art that required skill plus training, and that it was better to hold off until the boy could make a clean-up than to risk their whole future over a lady's reticule.

"You've got to look at it this way, Gahagan. We've invested a hull lot of thought and hard work and self-sacrifice in this boy. Suppose we start him now, and he dips into some old gentleman's change pocket and gets pinched. He's lost, and we don't get no return on our investment. But if we wait until he's in a mob that knows how to pick out big game and take care of the leather once the boy has it, he might last for years. Then we sit tight and clean up fifty thousand a year between us."

Nobody, much less Gahagan, could resist the logic of fifty thousand a year, and the big man took up the burden almost cheerfully—his old stunt of taking on local wrestling champions, he to pay them five dollars a minute if they stayed with him three minutes without being thrown. The prospect of earning fifteen dollars for three minutes' work had always brought him plenty of competition, and usually it was only necessary for him to carry his man along for two and three-quarter minutes and then pick him up and lay him on his back.

All this talk of going to Mexico Johnny had found to be romance, and it was impossible for him to escape. Gahagan had a heavy hand, which he did not hesitate to use, and the Professor as many eyes as Argus. The old man had put him to school—a school where he had to learn checkers—and he had learned beautifully. Now Johnny knew all the openings which have taken their names from the canny land of porridge—"Ayrshire Lassie," "Kelso Cross," "Laird and Lady"—and while Gahagan struggled with the local wrestling champions Johnny was to be matched against the checker players. He was the drawing card, but in addition to him there were a half dozen tables in the tent where those who wished to spend a quiet half hour over a game could do so.

The kewpie man wielded a clever brush, and he had made a banner showing an infantile Johnny playing checkers with a half dozen men simultaneously—all patriarchs with beards at least a foot long. Each of them wore a medal of some sort and all had ducal ribbons across the bosoms of their stiff shirts. Behold Johnny sitting under this banner, flushed rose pink, for the Professor had scrubbed him until he yelped, a little thinner than he had been when with Bender, and much less impudent.

His tutor had got him just the suit he needed—a dark-blue one, with knickerbockers and a broad Eton collar. The old man in his long black coat, black silk cap, and medals, looked like an alchemist as he walked up and down the platform ringing a big bell, which he swung up and then down, up and down, over his head and between his feet, pausing now and then to rap his flat hand against the canvas picture of Johnny defeating the best checker brains of Europe. Only on the banner his name was not Johnny—it was Rafael Turino.

Rumors of the boy checker player had already spread, and it did not take long for a crowd to gather whenever the Professor and his bell appeared. The tent stood at the end of the concession line away from the noise, and close to an abandoned tool shed where Johnny and his masters lived. The shed had this advantage over a tent for living purposes—Johnny could be locked up in it whenever he could not be watched. The advantage of being away under the willows was that it was quiet, and when the Professor set down his bell and stepped to the edge of the platform to address his audience he had no need to raise his voice beyond a charmingly intimate conversational tone.

On that particular day when Springtime was working his "gag" at Tom Osborne's, the Professor had a good crowd, for rumors concerning the boy had spread far, and it was a corner of the country where the checker champion is as great a man as Babe Ruth.

The ballyhoover scanned his audience with a chuckle, for it was the biggest crowd he had collected yet, and his trained eye told him that most of them were fans and

that there might be some who were willing to bet. Johnny had played two exhibitions, and had won them both so easily that his tutor had come to the conclusion that the boy was well-nigh invincible.

In that crowd were men with the cracker-barrel look on them, and especially one severe-looking man of about thirty whose chin faded away into a collar several sizes too large for him. He had been there before, and the Professor had watched his game against his peers—he had not played with Johnny—and had seen him win consistently. But when it came time for the exhibition matches he had always been elsewhere; this was the first time that he had been where the ballyhooer could lay his hand on him.

The Professor leaned over and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Friend, you're a pretty good checker player, aren't you?"

The other, who had been looking Johnny over as though he were a mysterious kind of beetle, gave the stern reply: "I lost a game two years ago in September."

The smile that this got from the Professor was perfect, for it assured the young man that his greatness had at last found true appreciation, and it told the crowd that here was something good. The ballyhooer shifted his hand from the candidate's shoulder to his elbow, guided him along the edge of the platform and up the steps to a seat beside Johnny, where he sat down, crossed his bony knees and tried to look as though he were used to being the cynosure of all eyes.

"Remember," said the Professor, "you are Number One."

Johnny chuckled, and, catching the eye of a girl in the crowd, winked. The Professor put his hands on his knees and bent over with the most engaging smile while he surveyed the people in front of him—long-faced, bearded, solemn-eyed men. He wanted another good one.

"Pick me a hard-boiled one," said Johnny out of the side of his mouth. "I'm feeling great to-day. Maybe this guy knows somebody that's as good as he is."

"A good idea!" said the Professor loudly. "Friend, if you know any one else in

this crowd of your own caliber, I'd take it as a great favor if you'd point them out."

Number One sat up and ran his cold eye over the group. One by one they came under that frigid glance, and one by one they went down for the count, until on the edge of the crowd he saw a red-faced farmer standing with his head tipped back, apparently hypnotized by the smoothness of the Professor or the excellence of the picture that showed Johnny beating all the champions of Europe.

Under his arm he carried a fat Plymouth Rock hen, who turned her silly eye this way and that. The Professor slapped his hands together and came down the steps, threaded his way through the crowd, and escorted the silent farmer to a seat on the other side of the boy marvel, for at sight of him Number One had said, "That's the one that beat me."

"Now remember," said the Professor, "you're Number Two." Then he turned with a good-natured grin and said to the people who had stood spellbound at this curious exhibition: "All right, folks—you can run along now to your hot-dog parlors and merry-go-rounds, and such vulgar forms of amusement. Nothing is going to happen here except this boy—this twelve-year-old boy—is going to take on these two champions. I am pitting the lad against these two grown men whose combined ages amount to"—he bent his head and whispered to his two victims, and, after they had whispered back, he went on—"seventy-four! Seventy-four years of experience pitted against twelve years of experience. And one game will be give-away and the other regular drafts. In case any of you should care to see the match the admission is twenty-five cents, and if any of you want to spend a quiet half hour over the boards you can have a set of men for another two bits. To the men who win goes a prize. I'm not saying *what* it is, but what is it that isn't human and has hands?"

He held up a small box between the thumb and forefinger of one hand and tapped it with the forefinger of the other.

Number One saw a difficulty at once, and said: "What if we both win?"

Thereupon the old man took another box from his coat pocket and tapped that. That settled it, and all that the Professor had to do for the next ten minutes was to make change as rapidly as he could, for there was not a man, woman or child there, including Tom Osborne and his daughter, who did not crowd in to see this unequal contest.

"Two at a time! Two at a time!" he chanted as he took in the money, and when all had gone in he stretched a rope across the entrance, and ushered the two men and Johnny into the inclosure. The old man whispered to the lad: "Remember the Kelso Cross!"

Johnny took his place between the two boards, confident and impudent. He was interested—displayed a great interest as the red-faced farmer put the hen down by the table leg, tucked her head under her wing, and drew several long strokes with his hand along her back. She clucked contentedly and settled down for the night, while her owner filled one cheek with tobacco and turned back his coat cuffs.

Number One took off his coat, folded it neatly, and put it over the back of his chair. Then he rubbed his hands dry with a handkerchief, polished his spectacles, and took his place, immediately cuddling his chin in the palm of his hand and never taking it out until the game was over.

To make it more difficult, Johnny was to play with white men on one board and black men on the other. The ballyhooer flipped coins for the opening moves, and the play began—rapidly on the part of the man with the hen, for, like many a good man, he could not stand publicity, and his embarrassment was hurting his game. But Number One took it to heart and pondered long before he put out a hand and made his opening move. He had chosen to play give-away, and with almost uncontrollable delight the Professor saw him make the weakest of opening shifts—one which in real checkers would have been the strongest, but in the opposite was decidedly bad.

The other player had made a weak one—on a numbered board it would have been 9-14—and Johnny pounced on him with the

quickness of a cat. So the game went for ten minutes, with the advantage on each side with the lad, who whirled from one board to the other with a smile on his lips and an occasional glance at his tutor which said, "Gee, what a lunch!"

The crowd was with him, and he felt it. "Gol!" said the farmer with the hen, for Johnny had taken two of his men. But he was a sport and simply bent his head until it almost touched the board and went on with his work. Johnny moved his hand as slowly as the paw of a stalking cat and shifted his checkers millimeter by millimeter.

The Professor circled about the crowd, trembling with excitement and wishing to Heaven that he had a good dip with him, for he judged that there were many good leathers among the watchers. There were three ten-dollar bills pinned in the waist-band of his trousers, and after watching Johnny make two more moves he began to roam with that thirty in his hands looking for possible bettors. And he found them—Tom Osborne took ten on the proposition that Johnny would not win by more than two men apiece. With thirty down and his hands lovingly cupped over the quarters and half dollars that weighed down his pockets, the Professor went almost mad from excitement, and when the sober young man would not admit that he had to take two of Johnny's men but canvassed every possible move at least twice, he sang out:

"Come along, friend, shake it up! This ain't chess!"

"There was no time limit set," was the stern response.

"Oh, my gosh!" said the Professor, and appealed to the crowd.

He was crazy to have the thing over, to have the thirty plus its winnings back in his pocket, and another crowd as big as this one coming through the door at two bits a head. Like the addle-headed old vagrant that he was, he took a position outside the ring, where he tried to signal Johnny just what moves to make, and Johnny, seeing the strange contortions of his face, and knowing that something was expected of him, but not what, made his first error.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**



# Barber Shop Chords

By CHARLES DIVINE

**M**Y beautiful yacht, white and shining like a jewel, had just dropped anchor in a bay of the blue Mediterranean, beneath the glittering walls of an old Moorish palace, on the balcony of which appeared the Sultana, who paused in her strumming of a lute to wave me a welcome with her flowerlike hand and blow kisses from lips which I knew were scented with jasmine, when all of a sudden Bill kicked me in the ribs.

I woke up. The sapphire sea vanished as I found myself in reality—the dark hotel bedroom, and Bill administering pedal punishment. It was supposed to be an honor to room with Bill Joslin, the manager of the Blue Sox baseball team, but at that moment I decided it was an outrage.

"What's eating you," I protested, kicking back—"mosquitoes?"

"Worse than that," he growled. "Cut out the noise."

"Who's making any? You're dreaming. I don't snore."

"Then what do you call it—"

He stopped abruptly, at a strange sound floating up from the street outside the window. I listened, and at once I knew that the voices of the night which had aroused Bill from slumber were those of close harmony:

"Dee-e-ar old gur-r-r-l

The rob-bins sing a-a-above you.

Dee-e-ar old gur-r-r-l

They speak of how I love you—"

Bill scrambled out of bed, complaining. I followed him to the window, where he stood pink with rage and pyjamas.

"It's the quartet," I whispered as I discerned the straw-hatted figures of Pudney, the pitcher; Scott, the first baseman; McNulty, the short stop; and Murray, the right fielder, with their heads bent together in lyric liason.

Bill reached for the bowl of water on the washstand, while the song continued:

"The bli-i-i-n-ding tears are fall-l-l-ling  
As I think of my lost pear-r-r-l,  
And my bro-o-o-ken heart is call-l-l-ling—"

Splash!

The contents of the bowl went down into the night, answering the call.

"Yes," added Bill, leaning from the window menacingly, "and your broken head will be calling soon if you don't beat it to your rooms before I let the bowl fly next."

"Look out," I cried, warning Bill against his quick anger. "Can't you see that's your star pitcher down there?"

"You mean, look out," retorted Bill. "Won't my pitcher see stars down there!"

The singers drew apart, wiping water from their shoulders. Pudney, the pitcher, looked up, laughing.

"Can't be you like our music, Bill. You ought to; it's the bee's knees."

After paying this tribute of modern slang to the lately interrupted selection, Pudney led the quartet away to a safer corner of the street.

Bill's voice followed them from the window:

"Can't you lay off the song stuff for one night? I'm running a ball team, not a glee club."

He slammed the bowl onto the washstand and came back to bed, grumbling. But he didn't get in. He sat there, lighting a cigarette and puffing at it dismally. Then he turned loose the floodgates of all his woes. I knew what was coming. We were tied with the Pirates for first place, the last week of the season was about to begin, with six hard games—three with the Stars and three with the Pirates; and Bill was desperately afraid we would lose out in the fight for the pennant.

"I've always known that ball players had a weakness for getting their heads together and singing," he said, "but I never thought it would grow to be the curse of my life the way it is at present. In all my days in this league I've never laid eyes on four players who thought so much more of warbling than ball playing that they'd stay up half the night, ruining their sleep for the sake of a few barber shop chords.

"Why is it that quartets can only function at night time? Why don't they go to bed at a reasonable hour and get up at six in the morning and do their howling by daylight—say, off in some deserted lot at the edge of town? But, no, that ain't the nature of the beast; they have to blat here under our windows night after night, robbing themselves and everybody within hearing of their proper rest; and then the next day they play dopey ball and get beaten. We can't afford to lose at this stage of the game."

Bill got up, perturbed, and began striding up and down the room in his bare feet.

"Pudney ought to know that. He's my one best bet, the fastest pitcher in the league, but what good will that do me without Rafferty!"

Bill had reached the real cause of his worry. He sank down on the bed again.

"I know," I sympathized. "Pudney's speed won't help us without a catcher who can hold him."

Pudney and Rafferty had constituted the star battery of the Blue Sox. Game after game they had worked together, winning victories that made them a famous pair, a couple which the sporting writers hailed as being as noted as Damon and Pythias, Pro and Con, Pick and Shovel.

But now Rafferty had been spiked badly in a recent game and could only hobble around on a crutch. We would have to depend on our second catcher, Preston, who was scarcely able to hold Pudney's speed when he was taking it easy—and, being a straight ball pitcher, he had to take it hard most of the time.

"I plan to use Pudney twice this week," went on Bill; "in to-morrow's game and again on Saturday in the final game. Between, I'll work the other boys. But Pudney ought not to keep the fellows up with his caterwauling all night. Doesn't he realize we've got to win the pennant? That Hobson and the other directors are clamoring for a championship this year. That if we don't give it to them there'll be new faces in the line-up next season, and yours and mine won't be among them!"

Silence fell between us while I pondered on the gravity in the manager's words.

"I thought you wanted to sleep, Bill?" I said at last.

"Sleep!" he cried, exasperated. "How can I sleep without a catcher?"

And he rolled over onto the bed with a groan of anguish. He continued to mutter far into the night.

## II.

IN the morning a telegram was delivered at the door. Bill read it, perplexed, and then passed it on to me. It read:

Anything Taynor says is all right.

It was signed by John Gray, the manager of the big league team which he had made famous by his uncanny knowledge of ball players and how to pick them. But whatever meaning lurked in the message was too obscure for us, and Bill put it away, absorbed, as he was, in getting the team ready to quit the hotel for morning practice, meeting a delegation of the directors, led by Alfred J. Hobson, and assuring them that he would do everything in his power to bring the championship to their city.

Bill was stopped on one of his hurried journeys through the lobby by a young man, unknown to him, who begged for a moment's conversation. He was a queer-looking youth. His face was of naturally composed features, but they were of unusual cast, molded in long, sloping lines with a thrust forward, a protuberance almost piscatorial. His eyes, too, were fishy-blue, though not unpleasant, and his gull-like mouth kept opening frequently, as if gulping for air.

"Here I am," he announced.

Bill looked at him, mystified.

"A fact almost self-evident. Whad'ya want?"

The stranger held out for Bill's inspection a piece of paper which proved to be a clipping from the *Morning Sun*:

### SNAPPY SOX CATCHER OUT OF FINAL SERIES

**Injury to Rafferty Breaks Up Great Battery On Eve Of Crucial Battle**

"Well," commented Bill gruffly, "you don't have to remind me of my troubles."

"No intention," replied the stranger amiably. "I want to make you forget them. I'm here to take Rafferty's place. I'm a catcher. I can do it."

Bill stared at him, amazed. The fellow's declaration that he could fill Rafferty's shoes was not made in a spirit of braggadocio, but apparently with a quiet confidence, an almost reverent faith, as if devoted to the truth—the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Yet the promise in such a statement was too good to be true. Bill regarded him sharply, noting his rugged solidity and six feet of brawn.

"Of course no other catcher in the circuit can hold Pudney. I tried eleven before I got Rafferty, and they all went home with lacerated hands and broken fingers. They either couldn't hold the ball or else had their mitts burned off their hands. Of course"—Bill smiled ironically—"you'd be the exception to the rule."

The stranger replied with a casual glance at his own hands.

"My digits have a quality of asbestos. Pudney can't burn 'em too fast for me."

Bill gasped.

"Is your name Mephistopheles?"

"No. Taynor—Orson Taynor."

Again Bill gasped. He remembered the telegram from John Gray:

Anything Taynor says is all right.

Suddenly he grabbed the other by the arm.

"Do you know the Giants' manager?"

"Certainly. Before I started for your city I sent him a telegram asking him to wire you a word or two, so you'd know me."

"A word or two? He wired a mouthful." Bill paused, reflectively. "Johnny knows his business, though he may have made a mistake this time. Well, come on, jump in the bus outside the door and ride to the field with the other players. I'll give you a uniform in the clubhouse and a tryout in half an hour."

Taynor followed Bill into the carry-all, loaded with ball players, bats, and gloves. Bill added: "Then you can catch the first train back home."

"I sold it yesterday."

"What?"

"My home."

The unexpectedness of the reply disconcerted Bill for a moment; then he asked:

"Where've you been playing this season?"

"Higgins's Corners, Tioga County."

"Never heard of it," snapped Bill suspiciously.

"Oh, it's a pretty place. I was playing around with the cows."

"The Cows? What league is that?"

"The Dairymen's."

The players, who, wedged tight along the side seats facing each other, had been leaning forward listening, now snickered gleefully.

"Whad'ya mean?" demanded Bill.

"Farming it. A hundred acres and thirty head of cattle—that is, I had thirty head till I sold them this week."

Bill let out a grunt of disgust.

"A farmer! I thought you were a ball player?"

"Not as a regular occupation. I chose farming for that, dairy farming, but the milk dealers put the price so low—less than five cents a quart they've been paying us, while they sell it to you here in the city for eleven—that a man can't keep cows and make a living any more. So I sold off my stock and decided to join your baseball club."

"Oh, you made the decision yourself, did you?" said Bill sarcastically. "Very chummy of you."

"No," corrected Taynor, "just practicable. I want a contract for next year, too."

Bill was so dumfounded that he was speechless. Around him the players were nudging each other, delighted.

"That's the cat's pyjamas," commented Pudney.

"Yes," added Scott, the first baseman, "and the snake's hips."

This slang was evidently new to Taynor. He turned to me for an explanation of it, and after I had pointed out that snakes do not have hips and that, therefore, the idea was entertaining as a metaphorical exaggeration, he agreed whole-heartedly.

There was no lack of learning in his comprehension.

"I see, you attribute physical appurtenances and apparel to creatures that don't possess them."

At this speech Bill's eyes widened.

"Not a bad idea," went on Taynor, and then invented a linguistic specimen of his own: "That's the oyster's ankles!"

"Good boy," approved Pudney. "You're elected."

Taynor was further received into *camaraderie* by the Blue Sox after the team reached the ball park and he received his tryout. Pudney pitched his fastest ball to him, sending the sphere through the air like a shot, with sizzling heat upon it as it smacked into the catcher's mitt—*phut—phat!* But Taynor simply stood with his feet solidly apart and received each pitch with cool dexterity.

There was no doubt about it, he could catch anything Pudney hurled. Bill Joslin was so pleased that he signed Taynor at once and sent him in for the afternoon game with the Stars, which we won by the convincing score of six to nothing.

Taynor not only performed creditably behind the bat, but managed to get a hit when it was needed. The fans were joyous, the stockholders proud, and Bill's hopes of winning the pennant rose high again.

Pudney and Taynor worked so well together as a battery that already their prowess was being hailed as that of a great pair—Put and Take.

Pudney came into the clubhouse full of praise for his catcher.

"Taynor, you're the bee's knees."

"Thanks, Pudney. It's a pleasure to catch a pitcher working as you did to-day. That was the mosquito's eyebrows."

When the bus came to take the players back to the hotel Bill Joslin found that there was no little difficulty in that portion of his managerial duties which demanded that he collect his Blue Sox in time for supper.

Five of them were still hovering in a corner of the locker room, making singularly plaintive sounds in which they were so engrossed that they had halted their dressing at the underwear stage. To his surprise Bill saw that Taynor was one of the lyric

group. On the way back to the hotel Bill protested to Pudney.

"Don't introduce my new catcher to this close harmony vice."

"Introduce him," echoed Pudney, laughing. "He knows more about it than we do. You ought to hear the stuff he gets on the barytone."

"My God!" groaned Bill. "Is he another barber shopper? I might have known there was a flaw in the fellow somewhere."

"He certainly picked up some great swipes at college."

"College? He's a farmer."

"Yes, scientific. He studied at a school up-State. That's where he played ball, too—one of the best college catchers in the East last year."

"For Heaven's sake, Pud," begged Bill, "don't keep him up all night singing! You don't pitch your next game till Saturday, but Taynor's going to catch again to-morrow. He'll need rest."

Bill's plea was in vain. That night, when the noises of the city streets grew still and Bill and I had retired to our room and what we were pleased to call the brass-knobbed arms of Morpheus, strains of closely harmonized song drifted up to the windows:

"Oh, Man-n-n-dy Lee, I lo-o-ve yuh  
'Deed I do, my Mandy Lee—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted the voice of Taynor, the new catcher. "We ought to do that over again. The barytone comes down on the first three notes, and the tenor goes up, and the lead holds the same note. That makes a beautiful swipe, and when we get to it, hold it."

"Yes," agreed Pudney's voice; "hold it."

Bill stuck his head out of the window.

"Hold it somewhere else," he cried, enraged.

The quartet, which had now become a quintet with the addition of Taynor, went on with their lyric outburst oblivious of Bill's disapproval, though they were careful to move away from the window to a spot secure from projectile attack.

Under the hotel portico they halted in lengthy and melodious explication, voiced from the viewpoint of a descendant of Africa, of how their money went to dress a

coal-black baby, buying her everything and keeping her in style.

There were new minor movements in the song and nuances which Taynor revealed to the others with great enthusiasm. He appeared to know everything, from such old pathetic ballads as "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" to more modern selections like "When Francis Dances with Me, Hully Gee," in which his leadership was eagerly followed. It was evident that Taynor's strange physiognomy, with his trick mouth which I had remarked as opening frequently, as if gulping for air, was also admirably fitted for the exhalation of these musical themes.

Pudney, the pitcher, hung on his explanatory remarks. Scott, the first baseman, learned new ways to carry the air, and all of them acquired from Taynor methods of hitting unusual notes that struck split harmonies in rapturous combination. But in Bill Joslin, the Blue Sox manager, they seemed to strike abdominal pains, causing him to lie on his bed groaning.

Outside his window an oft-repeated song concluded:

"For I love yuh, Mandy,  
'Deed I do,  
My-y-y Man-n-n-dy Le-e-e!"

"Good work, Taynor."

"Talk about the bee's knees; that was the clam's chin, wasn't it, Taynor?"

"Yes, and the lizard's mustache."

Bill Joslin tossed in agony.

### III.

THE next afternoon Bill made the appalling discovery that the epidemic of song which Taynor's coming had brought to an acute stage, was growing to be a distinct menace. It threatened to play a sinister part in the fight for the pennant, since the quartet carried their musical enthusiasm with them to the ball park, where, during the second game with the Stars, they devoted their time, while sitting on the bench awaiting a turn at bat, to inventing and rehearsing new chords.

Between the crack of bat meeting ball, and the umpire's cry of "Stre-e-e-i-ke!"



and the excited crowd's roar of approval or disapproval, subdued strains could be heard from time to time on the bench, where Pudney, Taynor, Scott, and McNulty sat with their heads close together, intent only on the parts they were humming. It was as if they dwelt in a world by themselves, cloistered from the tumult of the diamond by the walls—to Bill Joslin, it was the wails—of their musical structures.

"Is that the thing to do at a time like this," complained Bill to me, "when we're engaged in a serious championship battle? They ought to keep thinking of the game and go to bat with only one thought in their minds—to knock the ball over the fence."

For a moment silence hovered over the diamond, during which the quartet's voices could be heard in low rehearsal, singing a sentimentally imperative plea to bring the wagon home, John.

Bill jumped to his feet excitedly.

"No," he objected, facing them with flushed face. "Bring the bacon home. That's what I want."

His protestations did not halt the harmony, though we won the game, by the close margin of five to four. The next day we lost, chiefly because Taynor, who was on third base with two out, got so interested talking to the Stars' third baseman about the intricate swipes in a piece entitled "Roll the Bones," that he forgot to start for home when the ball was hit. The result was that he was caught at the plate with a run that would have tied the game and perhaps saved us from defeat.

That evening, in the hotel lobby, Bill Joslin wandered about, bemoaning and blasphemous. The loss of the game forced him to do a lot of unpleasant explaining to Alfred J. Hobson, the principal director of the club. Besides his financial backing of the Blue Sox, Hobson possessed other interests which made him one of the city's leading citizens. He was a banker. He was always doing things for the city's good. He helped to endow the library, gave an organ to the Presbyterian Church, established playgrounds for children, and bought a newspaper in which to have all these events accurately chronicled.

Now he was resolved to bring the league pennant to the city, and the forceful expression that sat upon his thin, taut face as he confronted Bill Joslin filled the manager with fear and trembling. Hobson held the purse strings. If he pulled them tight, like his face, Bill would have to do the same with his belt—and forget hunger and a next season's job.

"Fortunately the Pirates were beaten to-day, too," said Hobson. "So we still lead them by two games. Now, to win the pennant, all we have to do is to take one out of the three games we begin with the Pirates to-morrow."

"Yes, sir," nodded Bill deferentially, as if this information were new to him.

"And the best way to accomplish this is to capture the first game and make certain of it at the beginning. That fellow, Taynor, if he had started for home a second or two faster to-day, when Scott hit the ball, would have scored. We might not have lost."

"I know," Bill fingered his chin, nervously. "I hope he won't do it again."

Bill was doomed to further disappointment. We lost the first game with the Pirates before a crowd that filled the park to its capacity. On the way back to the hotel in the bus the quartet, instead of holding a studious post-mortem over the day's defeat, occupied itself with "Lindy, Lindy, Sweet as the Sugar Cane."

"How'd that go, Taynor?" asked Pudney at the conclusion of the song.

"That was the porcupine's powder puff."

"Did we do it as well as 'Strolling Home with Jennie'?"

"Oh, much better, boys. Though that other was the fish's socks. Now, let's try 'Nora Malone'—that's the caterpillar's collar button."

Bill Joslin could only groan.

"I've always wanted harmony on my teams, but I never thought I'd get too much of it."

The second game with the Pirates, too, was lost, though in the fifth inning we had three men on bases and only one out. Shapley was at bat, and the crowd waited, breathless, hoping he would drive out a hit. Meanwhile the "harmony hounds," as they

were called, hummed a snatch of song which they pronounced to be the chipmunk's knuckles—at the same time that Shapley hit into a double play and spoiled our scoring chances for that inning. It was in the ninth that the game was definitely lost, when a Pirate runner was on first base with two out, and another Pirate was at bat. Taynor, catching, had been humming a song half aloud which caught the umpire's attention.

Taynor turned around, with the ball in his hand, to repeat a line of the song for the umpire's special benefit, pointing out its superiority over the usual treatment accorded it. Bill Joslin shouted his head off trying to get Taynor's attention. By the time he succeeded, the Pirate runner on first had stolen second. He scored a minute later on a hit, and the tally won the game.

Bill Joslin was furious.

"If I could fine you a thousand dollars, I would," he told Taynor. "And if I had another catcher that could hold Pudney tomorrow, I'd not only fine you—I'd fire you!"

The worst of it was that Bill couldn't explain to Hobson or the other directors why Taynor had let that base runner steal second. Bill didn't dare tell him it was due to such an irregularity as a morbid interest in a barber shop chord.

Yet that interest continued to hold sway among the players. Late into the evening the singers were serenading the stars and the telephone poles outside the hotel, inspired to a protracted program by competition from the Pirates, who had a quartet of their own led by Crawford, the catcher. Crawford maintained that his quartet was better than Taynor's. Taynor retorted with lyrical proof under Bill Joslin's window.

Bill threw everything he could find out of the window.

"No wonder you quit the farm," he shouted disgustedly. "The cows all died of earache."

#### IV.

For eight innings the Blue Sox and the Pirates battled that last afternoon, with first one team ahead and then the other, while the vast crowd, packing the grand

stand, bleachers, and roped-off spaces beyond the outfield, thrilled and perspired and thrilled again. It was a game to break hearts and suspenders.

Pudney, our star twirler, pitched the best ball of his career. But so did Hornby, the Pirates' slab artist, and the last of the ninth arrived with the score tied at six—six. We had one more chance at bat, to bring in a winning run or let the contest go into extra innings, where Pudney could scarcely last.

Taynor, who had been catching an excellent game, despite certain tendencies to go into lyric concentration while on the bench, came first to the bat for the Blue Sox. He tried hard to drive out a hit, and managed to send a deep grounder between first and second base which he beat to the initial sack by the fraction of a second.

The crowd began to yell.

Hornby, the Pirate pitcher, got excited and sent a wild pitch up against the grand stand, giving Taynor the chance to go to second. He advanced to third on Pudney's grounder.

Then Scott came to bat, and the crowd clamored for a hit to bring Taynor home. But Scott struck out, amid the cessation of the clamor. That left Taynor still on third, with two men out and a weak man at bat, and Bill Joslin looking on in the grip of overwhelming agitation.

From his position on the bench, where he sat leaning forward tensely, his doubled-up fists beating a nervous rhythm against his thighs, he looked at Taynor leading off from third base and prayed that he would get home with the winning run, and he looked at McNulty at bat and prayed that somehow he would hit the ball to a safe spot that would enable Taynor to accomplish that homeward journey. The championship hung in the balance.

At his side Bill felt an elbow pressing itself insistently into his consciousness and his ribs. It proved to belong to Mr. Hobson, who had found the moment so crucial that he had deserted the other directors in the grand stand for this more intimate post at the edge of the battle.

"Can McNulty hit Hornby to-day?" demanded Hobson excitedly.

"Oh, Lord!" breathed Bill, with pardonable fervor. "If I knew that I wouldn't be sitting here suffering the way I do."

McNulty swung at the ball and missed. Bill thumped his thighs savagely.

Again the crowd roared its encouragement. Again McNulty swung and missed. Again Bill groaned.

"He seems to be cool enough," said Hobson.

"I know it," gasped Bill. "He's too cool."

It seemed as if Bill was right, for McNulty's attitude was almost one of detachment. In the silence that fell over the diamond his voice could be heard humming one of the songs Taynor had taught the quartet to sing so frequently.

The humming grew louder and burst into audible words. Then Crawford, the Pirate catcher, joined with him and made it a duet. Crawford appeared to be in no hurry to give Hornby the signal for the next ball he should pitch. Instead, he employed the delay to take up the tenor part of "Mandy Lee," while McNulty sang the lead. Their voices grew vibrant as they approached a significant chord at the end of the line.

Bill Joslin leaped up from the bench, enraged. Suddenly he stood still, rooted to the spot by the sight of Taynor walking in from third base.

"That's all wrong," shouted Taynor. He walked deliberately down the base line toward the singing batter and catcher. "Look here, Crawford, the tenor doesn't go down on that chord. It takes a half note rise—"

"Go back! Go back!" cried Bill, running out from the bench, beside himself at the sight of Taynor strolling casually toward the plate, as if there were no other issue at stake but the chord in "Mandy Lee."

Hornby, the Pirate pitcher, took a step forward and prepared to throw the ball to Crawford, alive to the chance of catching Taynor halfway between third and home—a position whose disadvantages Taynor seemed in no way to sense. He continued to direct his attention and advice to Crawford while the crowd looked on, amazed.

"Go back!" shrieked Bill Joslin.

"I know how that swipe goes," Crawford retorted to Taynor.

"No, you're wrong," insisted Taynor, approaching. "I'll show you how it goes. 'Your eyes, they shine like diamonds, love—'" His voice rang strong and clear.

And at that moment, while Crawford came forward to meet him on the third base line, and Hornby, the Pirate pitcher, leaped forward to toss the ball to his catcher, Taynor suddenly sprang into action. He deserted harmony for home.

Like a shot he darted past Crawford, who turned with a cry and tried to return to the plate ahead of him.

The ball came flashing through the air from Hornby and landed in Crawford's outstretched hand. The latter swung around to tag Taynor, but in that instant Taynor slid into the plate.

The umpire's lifted hand pronounced Taynor safe.

It was also the signal for a barbaric tumult of triumph, with the crowd surging out over the field, shouting, cheering, throwing hats in the air, and otherwise conducting itself in an insane fashion in celebration of the Blue Sox as the league champions.

Bill Joslin was bewildered, but happy. At the bench he pushed his way through an excited throng in an effort to reach Mr. Hobson, shake him by the hand, and so demonstrate that he had brought him the promised pennant. But Hobson ignored him and brushed past toward Taynor.

"I want to hear that fellow sing those notes again. He's got a fine B-flat arrangement. Maybe I can use it on the Presbyterian Church organ."

Bill dropped back on the bench, weakly.

"What was that, Taynor?"

It was Pudney's voice, paying tribute to his catcher as they moved forward surrounded by a crowd of admiring, jubilant fans.

"Was it the kangaroo's kilties or the alligator's garters?"

"Neither," smiled Taynor. "It was the hyena's harmonica."

Bill Joslin staggered to his feet.

"The next time I hire a ball team," he gasped, "I'll go to a singing school or the zoo—I don't know which!"



# A New Girl in Town

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "A Self-Made Thief," "Country Love," "Madame Storey's Way," etc.

## WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

COLONEL CRISPIN FLOWERDAY, an old soldier of fortune with an undeserved reputation as a *roué*, breaks with Myra Follett, an actress. He reports to Mrs. Guyon, a beautiful woman of high position, that he must find another girl to aid him in his efforts to get hold of some indiscreet letters written by Mrs. Guyon. Kirwan Sutcliffe, who stole them, has been blackmailing Mrs. Guyon for years. When the colonel returns home he finds Diantha Lore, a beautiful girl, waiting to see him. At the exclusive Forty-Four Club both Sutcliffe and Randal Guyon, who knows nothing of his pal's blackmailing his mother, meets and admires her. They quarrel and part company. Diantha encourages Sutcliffe in accordance with the colonel's plan. When Guyon warns her of the colonel's bad reputation Diantha orders him from the house.

## CHAPTER X.

### SUTLIFFE MAKES HAY.

DURING the days that followed Sutcliffe never wearied of working to improve his position with the colonel. Scarcely a day passed that he was not invited to tea or dinner at the Iberia. He was a little astonished by his own success.

"Doesn't the old fool ever think of me as a possible rival?" he wondered, with a complacent glance in his mirror. "Oh,

psshaw! I should worry! He's in his dotage!"

The colonel was accustomed to respect and deference from young men, but he did not like it much. Reminded him that he was growing old. Sutcliffe's method was more subtle. He treated the colonel familiarly as a man of his own age, and with a touch of envy as a better man than himself. His usual comment on the colonel's stories was: "Lord! What a fellow you are!"

It was in furtherance of his new char-

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 23.*

acter that the colonel had fallen into the habit of relating these stories of his career. Diantha loved them. They were always told in the colonel's plush-furnished library—a room, previous to Diantha's advent, as garish and cheerless as an old-fashioned hotel room. But she had worked a miracle in it by the simple expedients of bringing in a lamp with a mellow shade and insisting on having a fire always burning in the corner fireplace.

They sat in front of this, and the colonel would apparently get so absorbed in his story that Sutcliffe could give himself up to watching Diantha's face without danger of detection.

On one such occasion the colonel began: "When I was a youngster it used to make me sore that I couldn't be in two places at once. I missed the Nile expedition under Sir Garnet Wolseley because I got mixed up in the Riel rebellion in northern Canada."

"One life wasn't enough for you," murmured Sutcliffe.

The colonel laughed, and went on: "I joined a regiment of Canadian militia, and was sent up to Fort Edmonton. All the white settlers for miles around were crowded into a sort of stockade there in daily expectation of an attack by redskins. Lord! How those poor wretches carried on when we came marching up from the south! Ready to fall at our feet, you might say."

"That seems to have been your rôle through life, colonel!" laughed Sutcliffe.

"As a matter of fact, they were not in the slightest danger. There never was an attack. All the natives were busy down the river. After a couple of months loafing around the stockade, getting into mischief—Um! Ha! Where was I? Two companies of us were sent down the Saskatchewan to reinforce the garrison at Fort Pitt. Our commander—I forget his name—disappointed old captain of regulars, you know the type, they call 'em hard-boiled nowadays. Lord! How we despised him! Managed to make his life a burden, though."

"Trust you for that," murmured Sutcliffe.

"We floated down the river in two big batteaux—sturgeon-heads, they called them.

A lot of former bank clerks and counter jumpers, and this stupid old cod. The only man in the outfit who knew beans when the bag was open was young John Fraser, a half-breed, our pilot. Not the sort of half-breed you read about—a wise young fellow with a steady eye. He and I got to be pretty good pals.

"Fraser was a wizard at river work," the colonel went on, "but old know-it-all looked upon him as a 'nigger,' and would not take his advice. Consequently we divided our time in being hung up on gravel bars in the river and in loafing ashore while the boats were being mended. Old Who's-this—the name we gave him among ourselves wouldn't be suitable for a lady's ears—cursed and swore from morning till night and issued foolish orders which couldn't be carried out."

"It must be fierce to have to take orders from a man like that!" put in Sutcliffe.

"Well, there are ways of getting back," said the colonel with a twinkle. "That's what I'm coming to. Fraser and I staged a little comedy for his benefit. One day when they were mending the boats Fraser passed me a pair of buckskin pants and a birch bark package of a certain kind of red earth, and I slipped into the bush with them. There I changed my clothes, rubbed the red into my skin and stuck feathers in my hair. Then I made my way down river to a point they had to pass and waited, hidden."

At the critical point of his stories the colonel would always pause to relight his cigar or to take a fresh one.

"Well, what happened?" demanded his hearers.

"Oh, pretty soon I heard old What's-his-name bellowing upstream, and the two boats drifted into sight with all the bank clerks pulling a different stroke at the sweeps, like young ladies on the park lake. I waited until they were directly under me; then I ran out on the low bluff, gave an ear-splitting yell, danced a few steps of the war dance, and shot my gun over their heads." The colonel roared with laughter at the recollection.

"Fraser told me," he went on, "that his nibs fell down flat in the boat, screech-

ing that he was hit, and pulled half the camp duffel down on top of him for cover. He was half smothered when they dug him out."

"I wish I'd been there!" said Sutcliffe.

"Is that the end of the story?" asked Diantha.

"No—the beginning," said the colonel dryly. "Seems the secret had leaked out beforehand, and some of the fellows laughed so the old man smelled a rat. Before they made the next spelling place where I was to steal into camp he called the roll and discovered I was missing. Fraser came out to meet me and tip me off."

"But what could you do?"

"Well, Fraser and I talked it over. I had no fancy to be put under arrest by that old rhinoceros, and anyway the war had about petered out. Never had come up to specifications. I decided I wouldn't go back to camp. Fraser had friends on the Churchill River a hundred miles north who would put me on the regular route west to Lesser Slave Lake, he said, where Fraser's own people lived. He said a nerry man could make it."

"Through the trackless wilderness!" cried Sutcliffe.

"Well, Fraser knew it like a book," said the colonel. "He drew me a little map. I had my gun. Fraser gave me a blanket, a tomato can to boil my water in, a compass and plenty of ammunition. It was bad going; muskeg and coulee. The worst I had to contend with was the black flies. I looked as if I had the smallpox when I came out on the Churchill. I found Fraser's friends all right, and in the end I came to Lesser Slave Lake. They treated me like a king up there. Loseis! Um! Ha! A pretty name!"

"What's it mean?" asked Diantha.

"Duckling."

"Well, go on."

"That's all," said the colonel.

His stories had a way of breaking off at the most interesting point with an Um! Ha! when Diantha was present.

Sutcliffe's feelings toward Diantha changed subtly from day to day without his being altogether aware of it. He scout-

ed the idea that any woman could "get her hooks into me." In the beginning his attitude had been merely that of the hawk toward an enticing object of prey, but as the girl's particular sweetness had its way with him it began to be one and a certain Diantha that he hungered for to the exclusion of all other objects. And how he hungered for her! He had not been denied many desires in his life hitherto, and the difficulty of attaining to this one roused his ardor to fever heat.

He began to suspect that her ingenuousness was real. This annoyed him—it made his difficulties so much greater. But he could never be sure about it because there was a fatal confusion in his mind between goodness and stupidity. That is to say, he thought all good women must be stupid, and Diantha, provocative, daring and free of speech as she was, certainly was not stupid. On the other hand, she seemed to walk in a delicate armor of goodness that turned the point of all his efforts to establish an understanding between them.

The problem of her behavior toward himself continually puzzled Sutcliffe. The most reasonable hypothesis to him was that she was a naturally virtuous woman in an immoral situation. But a naturally virtuous woman who belonged to a man for the time being would keep all other men at arm's length. Not so Diantha. She seemed to like Sutcliffe more and more, and made no scruple of showing it. She encouraged him in such innocent ways as a girl might. Yet she was perfectly open and aboveboard with the colonel.

Sutcliffe could not reconcile it with the colonel's obvious and growing infatuation for Diantha. In short, the young man was completely baffled, but was not rendered any the less ardent for that.

One evening when he came to dinner he had the luck to find Diantha ready and waiting in the drawing-room while the colonel was still at his dressing. Such opportunities were rare.

"What a chance!" he murmured, taking her hand.

Diantha was in her most provoking mood. She refused to allow herself to be

drawn toward the shelter of the portières in the window embrasure.

"What for?" she asked.

"To speak to you alone!"

"Don't we always have just as good a time when the colonel is with us?"

"How do you know, when we've never been alone together?"

"He's often out of the room."

"Oh, for a moment or two. And always likely to pop in."

"Why shouldn't he? You make more fuss over him than I do."

"You know that's only so I can get to you."

"Heavens! And they say women are deceivers."

This seeming pretense of innocence annoyed Sutcliffe. He determined to break it up rudely.

"Oh, why pretend that you don't understand what I mean?"

"What do you mean?" asked Diantha.

"Suppose the colonel were to come in and find me making love to you?"

It was received not at all in the way he expected.

Diantha laughed.

"I suppose the poor old dear *would* be upset," she said. "But he'll have to get used to it, won't he? I've got to be made love to some time."

Sutcliffe stared. This seemed to him like superhuman hardihood in a woman. For the moment it quenched his ardor.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" demanded Diantha, laughing.

"I don't understand you," he said blankly.

"That's because I'm so transparent!"

Meanwhile Guyon was pursuing a miserable existence in outer darkness. He had not returned home to live. On the morning following his quarrel with Sutcliffe his things had been sent home, but in the afternoon of that day he received his grievous wound at the hand of Diantha, and he could not bear to reveal it to the kind and inquiring eyes at home.

He had left the Iberia in a daze and walked the streets for hours while the pain bored its way in. The bitterest part of the

pain was the suspicion of Diantha that formed in his mind.

"If she was straight," he told himself, "she must have seen that my motive in warning her was straight. Anybody whose conscience was clean would at least have investigated my story. She must have made all that fuss just as a smoke screen."

Late that night he presented himself at Kurt Oddie's door again.

"Here I am!" he said with his hang-dog air.

Oddie pulled him in. He presented a sad change from the night before. The light of resolution was quenched in his eyes; his plan of rehabilitation was abandoned before it was begun. He hung his head and mumbled his words. Oddie, in the off-hand way that concealed so much kindness, did his best to rouse him. But all that he could get out of him were such youthful-cynical tags as:

"What's the use? . . . Life's a rotten mess! . . . The only thing to do is to harden yourself! . . . The man who gets along is the man who doesn't give a damn!"

In the morning a gleam of hope occurred to Guyon. Though Diantha had repulsed him so thoroughly, she might nevertheless begin to think over what he had said. She might make inquiries. She might leave the colonel's house. He hastened back to Central Park South and watched all morning from across the road with his hat pulled over his eyes. When finally at noon he saw Diantha and the colonel come out, the pair of them smiling, gayly dressed, and obviously in perfect harmony, he abandoned himself to bitter cynicism.

That night he went back to the Forty-Four Club and played until morning. He slept at Oddie's, and at night was back at the tables, and every night thereafter. For a bitter and desperate young man he was supplied with far too much money. He did not care whether he won or lost, and so he generally won. Meanwhile, his dark eyes receded farther than ever into his head, and hard lines were drawn around his mouth.

When Oddie, keenly distressed, remonstrated with him humorously, Guyon said: "Sure, I'm a fool! The biggest fool on

earth, I guess! A *soft* fool! That's why I go to the tables. When the wheel spins I can forget for a second what a fool I really am."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CASINO.

ONE night, in the middle of dinner, Gumpel brought in a distressing message. John Duranty, an old pal of the colonel's, had been stricken with apoplexy. Except for doctors and nurses, he was alone in his apartment. The colonel instantly rose to go. Sutcliffe cast down his eyes to hide the glint of satisfaction that appeared in them. Diantha begged to be allowed to accompany the colonel. He would not hear of it.

"Sutcliffe, you take care of her," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Sutcliffe demurely.

The colonel went. The other two soon rose from the table. They had planned to go to the theater that night, but Sutcliffe said:

"Let's not go out."

Diantha was dubious.

"I'm sure the play is like a hundred others we have seen and shall see, and I may never get another chance to talk to you alone."

His voice shook a little, and Diantha thrilled to it. What girl would not?

"All right," she said, not meeting his eyes.

They sauntered back into the drawing-room. Sutcliffe's eyes brooded upon Diantha's adorable bare shoulders. She was wearing a black evening dress without any ornament except the Wexford pearls. The pearls mantled and glowed like little living bodies. The fairness of Diantha's skin lent them a dusky tinge.

As they passed the piano Diantha brushed her fingers across the keys. It was an immense mahogany grand with elaborate rococo designs embossed in gold. Once considered the very last word in the art of the cabinetmaker, its gorgeousness had lately become a joke in the household.

"This thing runs by electricity," remarked Diantha. "There's a generator

out in the hat stand that makes a noise like a trolley car climbing a hill. Shall I turn it on?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Sutcliffe.

"Wish I could play," she said. "I'd weave spells over you."

"Music isn't necessary for that."

Diantha laughed.

"You always have that sort of thing ready to hand out."

In the hollow of the big piano case was a little empire sofa. It was just outside the direct rays of the piano lamp; the center lights had not been turned on. In the warm half light and shielded by the piano from the observation of any one who might look in through the door, it made an inviting nook. They took it, as a matter of course.

Diantha was oppressed by the beating of her heart, and was oddly self-conscious for herself.

But she would not have turned back.

"Black is the thing for you to wear," murmured Sutcliffe.

"You've already said that about white, about pink, about silver cloth," laughed Diantha.

"I know. Everything you put on seems *the* thing—until the next thing. But there is something about you in black that—that takes a man's breath away."

Diantha laughed not quite naturally, and with a girl's instinct made a determined effort to keep the talk in the safe shallows. She rattled on about clothes.

He brushed it away with a gesture. He took her hand, and Diantha's light talk failed in her throat. It was amusing to play a game. But she had not foreseen how dangerous it was. This was playing with fire.

"What's the use of making believe?" he murmured.

Panic seized her. "Oh, Kirwan, don't! It's too soon! Let me be myself!"

He drew her slowly toward him. She resisted only a little. He flung his arms around her, and, straining her hard against his breast, pressed his lips to her pulsing throat.

The sweetness of her dizzied him. She lay perfectly inert in his arms, holding her



face out of reach of his lips. Alarmed by her stillness, he suddenly let her go, that he might see what was in her face. It was not at all what he expected.

She was gazing at him like a grave and startled child.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Why do you look at me like that?"

She brushed a hand across her eyes. She was perfectly honest then.

"I—I don't know," she stammered. "You just confuse me. I don't know what is expected of a girl. I must be myself."

This was a new type to Sutcliffe.

"Are you just playing with me?" he demanded.

She hung her head. "I didn't mind your doing it," she confessed. "But there's nothing in it. I don't like it!"

This hurt his vanity horribly.

"You're just a flirt!" he cried. "It's ridiculous for you to make believe you don't feel anything! Oh, God! You're so beautiful!"

He attempted roughly to take her in his arms again. This time she actively resisted. She got to her feet. He was reduced to the position of suppliant.

"Diantha! Diantha!"

"You don't love me," she said suddenly.

"Diantha! When I'm nearly out of my mind with wanting you! I can think of nothing else. When I'm away from you I'm lost!"

She slowly shook her head. "That's not the same thing, is it? If you really loved me—I'd know!" She added to herself: "And I couldn't do this."

This detached attitude was a more cruel blow to his self-love than any amount of denial, of resistance, could have been. He almost raved.

"You have no heart! And you accuse me of being cold!"

"Not exactly of being cold," she said, with the shadow of a smile.

He made to seize her again. She put a chair between them.

"Why can't you be sensible?" she pleaded. "I like you very much—but I can't share in these explosions. Why can't you let things take their course?"

"What do you think a man is?" he stormed. "Something tame? You led me on—you confessed it. Now you make believe you don't understand. There are ugly names for that sort of thing."

That look of hers pulled him up in mid-career—the grave, searching, slightly puzzled look of a child. "Why do you turn ugly, Kirwan?"

He was shamed and furious. He turned away from her. Dimly he understood that he should never possess her until he had destroyed in her the capacity to shame him with that look. He muttered under his breath:

"Heartless flirt! Just playing with me! You understand very well what you are about!"

Diantha knew he was just striking in the dark.

"I suppose I've got to excuse you on account of your feelings," she said good-humoredly. "But I'm not going to stay and let you go on abusing me. Come on, let's see the rest of that show."

"No!" he cried.

"Well, I'm going. You can stay here and play the electrical piano if you'd rather."

She went for her wrap.

Before they left the house a message was received from the colonel, saying he would not be home until morning. Sutcliffe cheered up. He persuaded himself that he was not, after all, so badly off. Diantha had not actually repulsed him. She had not mounted the high horse of outraged virtue, as most women would.

In a way of speaking, she had encouraged him to go ahead. Only that childish strangeness stood between them. And he had all night now.

On the way to the theater and in the darkened auditorium Sutcliffe kept a curb on his tongue, and made love to Diantha with his practiced eyes, with his shoulder touching hers, with fleeting caresses of his hand on hers. The incorrigible Diantha, who seemed strangely unversed in the ways of her sex, showed that she liked it rather, was amused by it, but her eyes continued to meet Sutcliffe's as untroubled by any

shadow of passion as pools reflecting the sky.

He bit his lip in chagrin.

As they came out of the theater he carelessly suggested a bite at the Forty-Four Club.

"Let's!" said Diantha. "I don't need a bite, but I'm pining to dance!"

The restaurant of restaurants was filled with the usual brilliant crowd. They were received with bows and flourishes and conducted to a point of vantage. Up and down the line eyes rolled askance at the newcomers with a sort of pleased malice. Colonel Flowerday's "ward" with Kirwan Sutcliffe!

That young man was a notorious thorn in the sides of husbands and guardians. It was sufficient. Sutcliffe, who knew perfectly well what they were thinking and saying, was not ill-pleased by it, for he held that a thing you are credited with having won is more than half won.

He ordered a light supper, and they got up to dance. The music was as seductive and exhilarating as champagne. Diantha yielded herself to its strains with a sigh of bliss. Sutcliffe was freshly enraptured by the burden of sweetness within his arm.

"Surely, surely, she must feel it now!" he thought.

But before they had made half a circuit of the room Diantha said in the most matter-of-fact way:

"Don't hold me so tight."

"I must!" he whispered. "I'll never let you go."

"If you don't loosen me I'll stand stock still!" she warned.

By way of answer he held her closer.

Diantha planted her two little feet, and Sutcliffe stumbled. He, the best dancer in the room. In order to avoid a worse *faux pas*, he had to release her, and they continued with the loss of only a single step, Sutcliffe fuming, Diantha serene.

When they returned to their table he said sorely: "I wonder you dance with me at all if I seem like a leper to you."

"You don't seem like a leper," said Diantha. "But I don't choose to dance with a boa-constrictor!"

Sutcliffe sulked. Dancing under the con-

ditions that she laid down had no charms for him. And the precious moments were slipping by. He suspected if he took her home he would fare no better than he had before they left home. Somehow he had to destroy that crystal clear quality in her that was always rebuking him. The sight of a gay party disappearing through the little passage to the rear gave him an idea.

"I see Dan Tanner's taking his guests upstairs," he said carelessly.

"What's upstairs?" queried Diantha.

"Oh, don't you know?"

"No."

He assumed an air of compunction.

"Oh, nothing much."

"What's upstairs?" said Diantha. "I insist on knowing."

"Nothing that would interest you. Gambling."

"Gambling?" she echoed. A little glint appeared in her eyes. "I'm terribly interested in gambling."

"What do you know about it?"

"Nothing. I want to know. I always loved to get hold of a book that had scenes of gambling in it. I'd read those parts over and over. But books are so unsatisfactory. They leave out what you want to know. I'd love to see some gambling!"

Sutcliffe's face turned smug. He thought: "Have I stumbled on her weak point?" Out loud he said with a virtuous air: "If that's the way you feel you'd better keep away from it."

"No," she said, half teasing, half in earnest, "if I brood on it I shall certainly become worse. Let me see how little there is in it, and it will cure me."

"I couldn't take you upstairs," Sutcliffe said. "What would the colonel say?"

"We need only stay a few minutes," said Diantha. "If he should ask me about it, I'll tell him I insisted on going. That will let you out, won't it?"

Sutcliffe still refused, but only for the purpose of making her more eager.

Diantha jumped up. "Oh, come on," she said. "I've got to go!"

Sutcliffe rose with a shrug, as much as to call the heavens to witness it was not his fault. He followed her out, smiling behind his hand.

The passage that led to the rear from the main stairway ended in a little wainscoted room where cigars were sold. There was no other visible means of egress. The attendant at the cigar stand, it appeared, was one of the most valuable employees of the house. In addition to selling cigars, it was he who in a single careless glance passed upon your fitness for admittance to the casino. No word needed to be spoken. If he knew you, one of the panels in the wall slid back, revealing the little electric elevator.

The floor above, like the restaurant, was laid out in a single long room extending from the front windows to the rear, but the chaste scheme of decoration was abandoned. Casinos the world over have an ornate style of their own. Red and gold were the prevailing notes; the place was brilliantly lighted by cut-glass electroliers hanging from the ceiling. Tall mirrors in ornate gold frames lined the walls; between them were placed red plush covered settees, which were very little used. Over the settees hung many really fine paintings which nobody looked at. Their quiet beauty seemed a little out of place amidst the garishness.

All attention was focused on the tables round, oblong and oval, up and down the room. As elsewhere in the Forty-Four Club, there was plenty of space.

As Diantha stepped out of the elevator she sniffed excitement in the air. Though the place was well filled, it was very quiet. There was a thrilling quality in the stillness. One heard the roll of little ivory balls, the click of chips, and the singsong drone of the croupiers. The players were of the same sort as the diners downstairs, but they seemed to have thrown off a certain restraint in mounting. Particularly the women, whose eyes glittered, whose rouged cheeks were mottled with a feverish flush, whose elaborate coiffures betrayed a tendency to abandon.

"Women should never gamble," thought Diantha with a little shiver.

Sharply distinguishable from the players around the tables were the dealers and croupiers, who appeared to belong to a race apart. Invariably thin men, it seemed,

with pale, hollowed, smooth-shaven cheeks, beautiful, nimble hands, and extraordinarily watchful eyes divested of all human expression. Presumably they were capable of emotion like other men, but on duty they were like nothing but marvelous pieces of mechanism.

"All French," whispered Sutcliffe. "They are the most reliable."

The first table at which they paused was an oval affair covered with green baize. In the center was a curious hole into which the cards were tossed after each hand.

"Baccarat," said Sutcliffe.

The croupier sat on one side. All he had to do was watch the game, take care of the cards, and drop the chips which represented the commission of the house through a slit in the table. Opposite him sat the principal player, or "banker" for the time being, and on each side between them were ranged five other players or "punters." The chips were placed, the cards dealt, the players' faces were livid or flushed according to their natures. Many of the terms were in French.

"High stakes," murmured Sutcliffe.

"I don't get the idea," said Diantha.

"Let's watch roulette. That's New York's own game."

The roulette table was a narrow rectangular affair as long as a good-sized room. There were two of them in the place, both doing a capacity business. The wheel was in the center of the table with two of the basilisk-eyed attendants on either side. Chairs were placed for the players at either hand, but most of them had been kicked aside. Close to the croupier at the first table sat an incredibly old woman brocaded and jeweled, with a tall head-dress slightly askew. She watched the wheel with her rheumy eyes, and her wrinkled, misshapen hands trembled.

The table was marked off in various subdivisions with numbers and colors, algebra to Diantha. But she soon began to get the hang of it. You could put your money—*i. e.*, chips—on a number, or split it between two numbers or a series. According to the risk you took was the greatness of your return if you won. Sutcliffe showed her further how one could play all the even

numbers or all the odd, the first eighteen or the last eighteen, the black or the red.

One of the attendants spun the wheel by pressing a lever. Another tossed a little ivory ball so that it ran in a groove around the outside of the wheel. The players craned their necks, watching the progress of the fateful pill with bated breath. Bets were still being placed on the board. When the ball began to slacken the attendant announced in his indifferent singsong: "*Rien ne va plus.*" Finally the little ball fell into one of the compartments of the wheel, and a sigh escaped the watchers.

"*Vingt-six, noir, pair, passe,*" announced the attendant, and the croupiers began to draw in the chips with their little long-handled boes.

So close was the press around the table that at first Diantha and Sutcliffe could see only by peering over the shoulders of those in front. Immediately in front of them was another young couple, the girl a mere child of a gamin prettiness, with discontented eyes and writhen scarlet lips; the youth square and sullen. She did the playing and always lost.

"Play on shorter odds," he urged. "You'll get more of a run,"

"There's nothing in it," she retorted.

Finally when she lost he muttered: "Got no more," and pulled her away from the table. Sutcliffe and Diantha instinctively squeezed into their places. The other pair lingered for a moment within hearing.

"Get some more chips," the girl said.

"I'm cleaned out, I tell you," he said sulkily.

"Can't you borrow?"

"No!"

"Well, I can, and I will!"

"Marjorie!" There was a curious suggestion of agony in his tone.

Her only answer was a laugh.

Diantha suddenly became aware that Sutcliffe was holding out a handful of red chips. She had no idea where he had got them. She violently shook her head.

"Go ahead!" he murmured. "We can't keep these places if we don't play."

"No, no, no!" she whispered.

"Play for me to bring me luck."

The general excitement infected her.

Scarcely knowing what she was doing she took a chip and placed it as she saw others doing on the intersection of two lines in the center of the board so that it encroached on the spaces of four different numbers. The wheel spun and the little ball rolled. Suddenly she perceived that the croupier was pushing a little pile of red chips toward her.

"All these? All these?" she murmured. She laughed, and something gave way inside her.

"Put 'em all out!" whispered Sutcliffe in her ear.

She needed no further urging.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BLOW.

GUYON entered the casino with the scowling, downcast air habitual to him of late. He kept his eyes down because he wished to avoid the deceitful-friendly, contemptuous looks of his acquaintances; he did not care to see the meaning glances they exchanged. He knew they were saying to each other with an unholy glee: "Guyon's hitting the toboggan, all right!"

He went quickly to the nearest roulette table. The place afflicted him with a slight nausea now, but with the tragic wrong-headedness of youth he whipped himself to it. A place was made for him. Guyon's play had become the newest sensation of the club. Wild tales were told of his gains and losses. His indifference to either endowed him with a sort of infernal distinction in the eyes of the other players.

He looked at no one. The wheel was spinning. When the result was announced a slight sound from across the table knocked on his naked heart. It was merely a half-suppressed exclamation of chagrin. His startled eyes beheld Diantha's tormented face, Sutcliffe, at her shoulder, glancing at her with an evil smile of which she was unaware. They had not discovered Guyon.

He received a hideous shock. Diantha held out her hand, and Sutcliffe dropped some chips into it. The action raked Guyon's breast with sharp points. He dropped back from the table.

Diantha was not feverish and disheveled like some of the other women; she was very pale, her eyes glittering. Worse than the merely feather-brained women, he saw that the very devil of gambling possessed her. Gone was her lovely and touching openness of look; her whole face was pinched and hardened by the ugly passion. He groaned inwardly at the sight. He knew it was her first visit to the place; he saw that it would prove her everlasting ruin unless she were quickly taken away.

He circled around the table, and by degrees worked himself close to Diantha's side. Sutcliffe saw the maneuver and scowled, but said nothing. Diantha was perfectly oblivious. Moments passed before Guyon could muster up the courage to speak to her, his heart was beating so, his tongue so numb. Finally he whispered:

"May I speak to you a moment?"

Diantha looked around in impatient surprise. Neither Guyon nor any man alive meant anything to her at that moment. Seeing who it was, her lip curled slightly, she shook her head and returned her fascinated gaze to the wheel. Sutcliffe smiled in hateful triumph, but Guyon was too anxious to think of that. He could almost have wrung his hands in his helplessness.

Diantha placed another bet. Guyon waited on the result. She lost. His desperate need sharpened his wits.

"I'm supposed to be an expert at this game," he whispered swiftly. "Let me tell you what I know."

It worked. She turned to him with a new look—sharp, eager, hard. To see that look on her face nearly broke his heart. Sutcliffe scowled at her move, but could not interfere.

"I've lost every time since the first time," said Diantha fretfully. "Other people win. It's not fair!"

Guyon's heart yearned over her as over an unconscious child in danger. His deep eyes quested in her face while he sought for the right words to say.

"Well?" said Diantha impatiently.

"Come away!" he whispered. "This is no fit place for you. If you knew how terrible it was to find you here—looking like these other women!"

Diantha stared at him angrily. "Is that what you wanted to say. Well! You're a nice one to be saying it!"

"It's because I know how rotten it is that it hurts so to see you here!" he whispered. "Leave me out of it. I'm bound for hell in my own way. But you—you were like something happy and natural—something out of doors—away from cities—I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to," Diantha murmured coolly, and returned to her place at the board.

The smile returned to Sutcliffe's face. He gave Diantha more chips. Guyon stood back watching her with the same look of desperate anxiety. Her scorn had not touched him. He was not thinking of himself now, but only of her. For her sake he could even humiliate his pride to the point of appealing to his successful rival.

Approaching Sutcliffe, Guyon said in a tone chosen to avoid giving offense: "Just a moment, Sut."

Sutcliffe could not, very well refuse the direct request. But indeed he had no wish to. He foresaw an opportunity to triumph further over his rival. The two walked a few paces from the table. Diantha, absorbed in her play, paid no attention.

They talked in careful undertones. Said Guyon: "Sut, this place is bad for her!"

"So they say," sneered Sutcliffe. He took a cigarette with a bored air.

"But I mean specially bad for her," Guyon persisted. "She must have had the seeds of it in her. That's not her fault. But see what it's doing to her. She doesn't even know what's the matter with her. She can't take care of herself!"

"I can't see that's it's any business of yours," Sutcliffe said with a hard stare.

"Oh, leave me out of it," said Guyon. "It's any decent man's business, isn't it, to take care of her?"

"Really, Guyon, you ought to go on the stage," laughed Sutcliffe.

Guyon still schooled his rising anger.

"Look here, Sut, I don't want to make you sore. There are things I could say—but I want to appeal to your sense of decency. Look at her! Can you let her go on? That child?"

"They mature early nowadays," said Sutcliffe.

Guyon's curiously inscrutable face suddenly began to work painfully. He said unsteadily: "You think you can say what you like to me because I hate a row. But I warn you—don't push me too far! There's something desperate in me—"

Sutcliffe laughed with intolerable slow insolence.

Something snapped inside Guyon. A film of red sprang between his eyes and the vivid scene. Sutcliffe received the surprise of his life. At the sharp crack of fist on flesh, play at all the tables ceased as by magic, and a hundred startled faces turned in the direction of the sound. Those of the attendants whose business it was to keep watch over the room at large started toward the young men, but not too swiftly. So swift was the blow that it is doubtful if anybody actually saw it passed.

With the turning of all those curious faces both young men, with the prime instinct of their kind, put on their masks. Guyon, sobered by the thought of a scandal affecting *her*, pulled out his cigarette case with quick self-possession, and offered the contents to Sutcliffe. Sutcliffe dropped the cigarette he still held and took one of Guyon's. The attendants seeing that the young men were not going to forget decorum, melted into the background again. The players, after a brief stare, made up their minds they could not have heard aright, and returned to their play.

When the two felt themselves unobserved their hard eyes met again. Sutcliffe viciously threw down the cigarette.

"You know I can't lick you here, you pup!" he muttered. "But you needn't think you're going to escape me!"

"Anywhere you say," said Guyon coolly.

"We don't want any publicity."

"My idea, too."

"In the park somewhere, soon as it gets light."

"All right."

"Cross the bridge over the swan lake and follow the path behind the little rocky hill. On the right-hand side there's a slope of grass down to the lake. At the bottom of that."

"I'll be there."

"If you're not I'll get you wherever you are."

"You needn't worry."

Sutcliffe returned to Diantha. Guyon went to one of the plush-covered settees a little way off and sat down to watch.

However Diantha had scorned him, his appeal to her proved to be not without its effect. Perhaps she suspected that more had taken place between the two young men than the room was aware of. At any rate, Sutcliffe had no sooner come back to her than she turned from the table with a jaded air and asked him to take her home. Her expression had changed. There was realization in her eyes. She made her way quickly out of the room.

Guyon advanced to the table and bet recklessly.

On the way home in the taxicab Diantha's eyes were haunted. But as long as Sutcliffe was at her side she would not, she could not, admit things to herself. In order to keep the ugly thoughts at bay she talked incessantly of other things.

"How silly that play was to-night! Do the people who write plays really expect us to believe that sort of thing?"

"Well, they've got to write something," said Sutcliffe.

"But to choke her because he found out she wasn't as good as he thought! She wasn't his wife. It was none of his business. Men don't act that way!"

"How do you know?"

"Oh, one knows—by instinct! We're all human together, aren't we? When some one you care for turns out to be no good it's *crushing*! You don't fly into a rage. And she, to take it so meekly! If she had really been square she'd have fought! Makes me mad the way good women are always supposed to be meek. If I loved a man I'd have to fight him—somehow. I expect lovers have frightful quarrels, they are able to hurt each other so. And, of course, if you know you can hurt, nobody is angel enough to keep from doing it sometimes. But how terrible to find out that somebody you care for is no good—"

This was slightly over Sutcliffe's head, hence it bored him.

"The safest thing is never to expect too much," he said with an air of disposing of the subject.

"But who wants to be safe?" cried Diantha. "Turtles and crabs are safe enough, I suppose!"

Not until they were approaching the Iberia did her real thoughts peep out.

"What happened between you and—that man?" she asked breathlessly.

"He insulted you," answered Sutcliffe readily. "I struck him before I thought."

"Oh!" breathed Diantha, amazed. "And did he take it so quietly?"

"No," said Sutcliffe; "we are to meet later, and I'll finish the job."

"Oh! You're not going to—"

"Not with pistols or swords," laughed Sutcliffe. "My fists will be sufficient to teach him to respect you."

"Where?" she whispered.

"In the park, as soon as it's light. Across the bridge over the swan lake."

Diantha had no reason to disbelieve his version. Her own opinion of herself was in the dust, and it was sweet to her to think that little as she deserved it, there was still a man willing to fight in defense of her good name. As the cab stopped she put her hand on his, and softly pressed his fingers.

Fire coursed through the man's veins. He tried to seize her, but the chauffeur was already opening the door. They had to get out.

Diantha skipped up the steps and rang the bell. Sutcliffe paid the chauffeur and joined her. She divined that he meant to follow her in.

"No, no, no!" she said.

"Diantha! The colonel won't be home until morning," he urged a little thickly.

She resolutely shook her head.

She saw that he had no intention of obeying her, and when the servant opened the door she said loud enough for the man to hear:

"Good night! Call me up in the morning."

Sutcliffe was obliged to fall back. The door was closed. He turned down the steps, cursing the cowardice of women. It was to that that he ascribed her refusal.

As soon as Diantha found herself alone

a swarm of ugly thoughts attacked her like devils. Scarcely knowing what she was doing she let her things lie where they fell. She flung herself on the bed, and jumped up again to walk unevenly. There was no escaping the torment.

"What could have got into me? It's a sort of madness! It's worse than drinking! Oh, and I thought I was decent! I thought I was strong. I was the same as that old woman with the shaking hands. I was the same as that wicked girl who was driving her boy husband mad—

"And to have *him* see me like that! That wicked-minded man! What a chance it gave him against me! Oh, if I could only sponge it out! If I only could—

"Now they're going to fight. I did nothing to prevent it. I was glad. I encouraged Sutcliffe. Have I taken leave of all decency, all shame? How can I get through till morning, not knowing what is happening? Sutcliffe may kill him in his anger!

"Good Heavens! I must owe Sutcliffe hundreds of dollars—hundreds of dollars! What a disgrace!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE FOGGY DAWN.

AT six o'clock in the morning the chief croupier at the roulette table announced to those sitting around it: "The bank is closed, gentlemen!"

He yawned in almost human fashion, and commenced to draw the chips into a green baize bag. The half score players left at the table, all men, deprived of their sustaining excitement, seemed to telescope slightly inside their clothes. They looked around them, blinking like men awakening from sleep, unrefreshed. Some attempted to cover their horrible emptiness with a swagger, some turned to pass feeble amenities with their neighbors, some were surly. The most ghastly thing about gambling is being obliged to stop some time.

Randal Guyon got up, and going to one of the rear windows, peeped behind the curtains. Out of doors it was still as dark as midnight. He shivered. How to pass the remaining half hour or so without thinking!

As he left the window he was hailed by Tabor, a man even younger than himself, with an air of manly bravado and the eyes of a piteous boy.

"Say, Guyon, I got my car downstairs. 'S too early for breakfast. Let's ride around a while and cast the cubes. I'll borrow a folding card table."

"I'm on," said Guyon.

The car, a big limousine, stood just beyond the door with the chauffeur asleep inside. Tabor shook him awake, and he slid under his wheel.

"Where to?" he asked.

"You can just stop here," said Tabor. "We'll pull the curtains."

At such an hour a chauffeur may permit himself a certain freedom.

"If you pull the curtains," he said indifferently, "the cop on the beat 'll get nosy."

"Oh, well, drive anywhere you like, then," said Tabor. "But choose smooth pavements."

Inside they drew the curtains, turned on the dome light, and spreading the board on their knees, shook the dice. Outside the early birds, hurrying to work, sneered enviously at the big slow-moving car with the curtains drawn.

For Guyon the game lacked zest. There was a weight on his breast that would not be forgotten. By and by he looked out from the curtains and perceived a faint gray suffusion in the sky. The street was full of fog.

"Got to leave you now," he said.

"Oh, hell!" protested Tabor. "'S too early."

But Guyon put out the light and drew a curtain. "Where are we? Eighth Avenue. Here's the Elevated station. Ask your man to put me down at the Plaza entrance to the park."

Tabor did so. "What the hell are you after in the park at this hour?" he asked.

"Oh, just a walk to clear my brain."

"Good idea!" said Tabor. "I'll come with you."

Guyon shook his head.

"You're a good fellow," he said. "But I don't want you."

"Ha!" said Tabor. "You got a date!"

Guyon shrugged.

"At six thirty on a winter's morning with a fog as thick as cheese!" said Tabor facetiously. "That is a novelty!"

Guyon let it go at that.

"Good luck!" Tabor called after him as he got out of the car.

Guyon walked quickly into the park. The air was tepid and saturated with moisture; the earth was like a full sponge; all the snow had melted. It was that moment of mystery when objects begin to reveal themselves in perspective, but as yet without any tinge of color. There was light, but the source of it was obscure. Gaunt trees stalked out of the fog, showed a clean-cut silhouette against the murky sky for a moment, then receded into oblivion. There was a ceaseless drip from their branches sounding like a myriad little stumbling feet.

Guyon circled the pond, and crossed the narrows by the arched bridge. In a little bay he saw for a moment a swan floating motionless with inclined head like a carved bird. He met no other living creature. Beyond the bridge the rocky hillock deadened the grumble of the town, but he never lost it quite, even at that deathly hour a curiously disturbing murmur, distant trolley cars, Elevated trains, milk wagons, and motors.

At his right was the slope of grass. He knew it well, for as a child he had surreptitiously coasted there at the imminent risk of plunging into an arm of the lake at the bottom. Leaving the paved path he went down the slope, digging his heels into the soft turf to keep from slipping. His light pumps were soon soaked through. At the bottom was a narrow space of grass, then the little bay. He was the first there. He waited, shivering.

In the close stillness, encompassed by the fog, he could no longer keep from thinking. Never did a lady's champion await the issue with less ardor. It was not fear, for he was indifferent to his own fate, but it suddenly seemed to him that he was playing the part of a foolish schoolboy.

Even if he knocked Sutcliffe out, how would it help Diantha any? And it was much more likely that Sutcliffe, a bigger man and a trained boxer, would knock him



out. In that event wickedness would triumphantly justify itself by reason of an ounce or two more muscle. Guyon bitterly repented his rash blow in the Casino. His only hope was that Sutcliffe, upon awakening, would feel foolish, too, and would not come.

But even as he wished it, he heard his man come thudding down the slope on his heels. Sutcliffe's tall form pushed through the veils of fog. They regarded each other warily without speaking. Sutcliffe had had some sleep, a bath and an alcohol rub, and he looked fresh. His sweater, flannel trousers and sneakers contrasted oddly with Guyon's incongruous evening clothes.

Nevertheless, for all his scowl, it was clear that Sutcliffe had not much more stomach for a fight than Guyon. His glance was uncertain. Indeed, from any point of view it was ludicrous to think of starting anything in cold blood at that hour in such a situation. But Sutcliffe would never have admitted it even to himself.

To Guyon their two selves, and for that matter all humankind, suddenly seemed so insignificant there in the presence of the mystery of dawn, that he experienced a warm fellow feeling for the other blind mite. After all, they had lived together. They had had good times; Sutcliffe had his points.

He said impulsively: "Sut, I believe we're a pair of fools!"

But the other only sneered. "Speak for yourself!"

"I will. I want to tell you I'm damn sorry for last night. I lost my head. I'm willing to apologize."

"Think that's going to get you off your liking?" sneered Sutcliffe.

Guyon shrugged.

"Oh, if you insist on fighting I'll stand up to you. You're the injured party. But it seems so foolish now!"

"Take off your coat!"

"Whichever way it turns out it can't change the rights of the matter," Guyon persisted. "Can't we talk about it reasonably?"

"No! You're jealous of me," said Sutcliffe.

"You're wrong," said Guyon. "My eyes

are open. A certain person has taken an aversion to me. Whatever happens I count myself out of the running. I just didn't have any luck, that's all."

Sutcliffe only looked at Guyon and gave a disagreeable laugh.

"I take it you're in love with her, too," said Guyon diffidently. "That's what made me feel we could understand each other."

"That's my affair," said Sutcliffe.

"You had all the luck," said Guyon. "You see her every day. Must know her pretty well by now. You couldn't know her so well without being a better man for it."

This sort of talk made Sutcliffe squirm internally. "Oh, for God's sake—" he burst out.

"Answer me one question and I'm through," persisted Guyon. "Haven't you found out that I was right about her in the beginning?"

"No!" cried Sutcliffe. "On the contrary, she's given me the best proof that I was right about her!"

A spasm passed over Guyon's face. "You lie!" he said. He tore off his coat and flung it on the ground.

He was the aggressor now. He advanced, crouching, and on his face Sutcliffe saw the same expression that had so astonished him the night before. Suddenly Guyon rushed him. Sutcliffe side-stepped and attempted to jab him as he passed, but missed. Guyon, whirling, got under his guard and landed on his body with both right and left. Sutcliffe grunted with pain and surprise, and gave ground.

The fog encompassed them about like a void. The broad earth had disappeared. Alone on their little island of firm ground they struggled futilely. They were too angry to retain much science. They slipped and floundered in the treacherous grass and drove their fists into the air. There were no lookers-on, and neither was disposed to be overscrupulous. Sutcliffe, in particular, was filled with a wild hate because Guyon had put him in the wrong.

Sutcliffe finally caught Guyon a stinging clip under the ear that stretched the lighter man flat in the grass. Sutcliffe raised his

foot, but Guyon rolled nimbly out of the way, and sprang to his feet like a cat.

"You cur!" he gasped. "I know you now!"

Guyon, who hated to fight, fought like a madman, blind, deaf, self-regardless. In the beginning all the advantage was with him. His crazy rushes and lightninglike blows confused the heavier man. Sutcliffe had put Guyon down in his mind as a milk sop, consequently a painful mental readjustment was required. Sutcliffe stopped Guyon with a dozen blows, any one of which ought to have given him his fill. But Guyon, with bloody and disfigured face, came back each time for more. All experienced fighters instinctively pause to rest themselves and pick their openings. But as fast as Guyon was knocked down he flung himself back on Sutcliffe's fists. Sutcliffe began to feel as if he had a mad dog on his hands.

But while Guyon kept Sutcliffe worried he had no chance of being able to finish him. There was not enough steam behind his blows. When Sutcliffe discovered this the tide changed. He took his punishment undisturbed, while he waited his chance to land a finishing blow. A spot just off the point of Guyon's lean jaw was his mark. Half a dozen times he drove for it and missed. In the end Guyon, having missed him, swayed uncertainly on his slippery footing, and Sutcliffe got his chance. There was a crack; Guyon went down and lay still. Sutcliffe, working the fingers of his bruised hand, looked down at him contemptuously. He wasn't even worth kicking. Knocked out clean.

The fog had thinned a little. There came a light rushing sound down the slope of grass, and suddenly Diantha stood beside Sutcliffe. She was enveloped in a long fur coat, her satin slippers were muddy, her hair hastily twisted up. Sutcliffe started back; he was not, however, so much surprised as he seemed. Had he not given her the location of the rendezvous? It was not exactly displeasing to be discovered in the rôle of the conquering hero, his rival at his feet. He put on a modest air.

Diantha looked at Guyon and said in a terrified voice: "Have you killed him?"

"Not quite," said Sutcliffe, smiling.

"Are you sure?"

"Hear him breathe."

It was true Guyon's stertorous breathing was quite audible. Diantha's strained face relaxed. Then she frowned at Sutcliffe.

"You savage!" she said.

No man minds such an epithet under the circumstances. "He won't insult you again," Sutcliffe said complacently.

"Was it necessary to half kill him?"

"He was trying his damndest to do it to me."

"You're bigger."

Sutcliffe shrugged. "I wish for your sake it had been a harder job."

"Oh, you're mistaken if you think I pride myself on this," she said quickly. "I acted like a fool last night!"

She leaned over Guyon, but not very close.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured compassionately.

Sutcliffe turned sore.

"Oh, it's him you're sorry for!"

She shook her head and turned from Guyon. "He's hurt. He's the underdog. I can't help it. What are you going to do now?"

"Take you home."

"You can't leave him lying here! He might die of exposure!"

Sutcliffe laughed.

"You're not used to knockouts. He'll be all right in a minute."

However, it occurred to Sutcliffe that if anybody else found Guyon and the story came out it would be awkward.

"How did you get here?" he asked.

"A taxi," she said. "It's waiting in the drive across the bridge. I couldn't sleep a wink. When it began to get light I couldn't stay still. The doorman got me the cab. I suppose he thinks I'm crazy. And the chauffeur also, when I told him to wait there, and ran across the bridge like a crazy woman. When I got on this side I could hear you stamping and punching each other—"

"You could hear us?" said Sutcliffe, scowling. "Was there anybody around?"

"No."

Sutcliffe looked about him, nervously seeking to peer through the mist.

"Nice story for the newspapers if we were all found here together," he muttered. "You must go right back. Wait in the taxi for me."

"Will you bring him?"

"Not on your life! I'll drag him up the hill and leave him on a bench."

"You're inhuman!"

"Go quickly! The fog is lifting. In a minute we'll be revealed to the whole lake."

"You must stay with him till he comes to his senses. Promise me that or I won't stir!"

"I promise."

She fled up the slope, but not before Guyon had seen her. He closed his eyes again. The whole situation was instantly clear to him. Somehow Sutcliffe had contrived to get her there, to witness his humiliation. It added the last drop to his cup of bitterness. He doggedly drained it.

Sutcliffe put his hands under Guyon's arms, and sought roughly to drag him to a sitting posture. But Guyon twisted clear of him.

"Let me alone," he muttered. "I can take care of myself."

Sutcliffe laughed. "Sojering, eh? I thought as much."

Guyon managed to scramble to his knees, then to his feet, where he stood swaying, supporting himself with his arm around a young tree.

"Well, I hope you've learned your lesson," sneered Sutcliffe.

"Get away from me," said Guyon thickly.

Sutcliffe laughed and went up the slope.

Guyon was still groggy. In stooping to pick up his coat he fell again. He was finally obliged to drag himself up the hill on all fours. At the top he fell into a bench beside the footpath in order to recover his strength, and think for himself.

When the colonel came home to his breakfast a pale but resolute Diantha told him of everything that had happened during the preceding strenuous twelve hours. This time she spared herself no detail. The story had not progressed far before the colonel became greatly agitated. It was one thing

to plan a liberal education for the girl who had wound herself around his heart; it was another thing to hear of its actual working out.

"He kissed you!" he exclaimed furiously. "That swine!"

"Only on my neck," said Diantha coolly. "The first one took me by surprise. I shall be on my guard another time."

Pretty soon the colonel had further cause to become agitated. "Took you upstairs to the Casino! Encouraged you to gamble!"

Diantha faltered.

"There I confess I made a fool of myself," she murmured. "It went to my head. I forgot everything; our work; Sutcliffe; everything. I only had a madness to gamble. I didn't know I had such horrible possibilities!"

The colonel was staring at her speechless, all his rosy color turned ashy, a little network of dark veins standing out on his cheeks.

Diantha raised her head.

"But, anyhow, I've learned my lesson," she said firmly. "At least, I know my own weakness now. Wild horses wouldn't drag me back to that place again. I'll never touch another card, nor a chip, nor dice while I live!"

A breath of relief escaped the colonel.

"Well, then, there's something to be said for my system, after all," he said in a very low tone.

"I must owe Sutcliffe hundreds of dollars," Diantha murmured in the deepest distress.

"That's nothing," he said. "You can pay him back."

When Diantha came to the place where Guyon intervened, the colonel jumped up, and smote his palm with his fist. "That young fellow again! Good God! How unlucky! He'll ruin everything!"

Diantha, unaware of any reason for so great an agitation, looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, I suppose he meant well, he meant well!" muttered the colonel, striding up and down. "But—oh, confound him, anyway!"

Diantha had not forgiven herself for the previous night, but she was not disposed to

be easy on Guyon, either. "Oh, no doubt he meant well," she said coldly. "But I hate a self-righteous young man. He goes there to gamble himself. What right had he to blame me for it!"

The colonel remained discreetly silent. Meanwhile the story was becoming more and more dramatic.

At last he cried out: "Sutcliffe knocked him out! Gad! You're sure Guyon wasn't injured?"

"I made Sutcliffe stay with him until he came to his senses."

The colonel thought things over for a few moments.

"Oh, well, I suppose a licking won't do him any real harm," he said. "He's young—and it will force him to keep out of this affair hereafter. That's a gain."

"I shall never see him again!" said Diantha energetically.

"What became of Sutcliffe after?" asked the colonel.

"He had to go home to dress. I suppose he'll be back directly. But I shan't see him. He would be too difficult to handle after so exciting a scene. He's crazy about me in his way. But it doesn't go very deep yet. He's got to suffer a bit in order to become more tractable."

The colonel stared a little. "My God! You're learning fast!" he said.

"Oh, those are things no woman has to be taught!" said Diantha.

Meanwhile young Randal Guyon, sitting on the park bench, faced despair. He pictured Diantha and Sutcliffe driving away together. In the ears of his mind he heard their laughter. But he faced it. And if a man will face despair it may be faced out. A sort of dialogue went on inside him.

"You're licked! You're licked! You're licked! Get that into your consciousness! Wouldn't it be better to go back and throw myself into the lake down there? But you stood up to him. Are you going to quit now? I can't live with this feeling of shame, this hopelessness! Then wipe it out! How can I? I did my best. He's stronger than I. You could do it if you had the will to do it."

"By God! I *will* do it! I was a fool from the beginning to think I could talk to Sutcliffe. The only thing that would impress him is a licking. And, so help me God, I'm going to give it to him! Every bit of nerve, of strength, of will power that I have shall go to it. I'll think of nothing else until it's done. I'll wipe out this feeling of shame—and in her presence! I swear it!"

He buttoned his overcoat up to his chin, and pulled his hat down over his eyes. He walked to the park entrance and hailed a taxi. It wasn't the chauffeur's business to question such an apparition. Guyon had himself taken to Oddie's place, thanking God that he possessed such a place of refuge.

At sight of his friend's bruised and bloody countenance, Oddie blinked behind his glasses and comically pursed up his lips.

"For God's sake don't ask me any questions!" implored Guyon.

Oddie laid a hand on his shoulder. "Son, do I ever ask questions?"

"No," replied Guyon, and then, inconsistently, he added, "I'll tell you all about it."

"Don't want to hear it," said Oddie. "Come in and take a bath. I'll order in a bang-up breakfast—or supper, or whatever it may be for you. Then bed for yours. You'll have to lie low for a few days. Do you good. Maybe I can find one of those fellows who paint out shiners. Never needed one myself. I'll leave you out plenty novels to read."

"Never mind the novels," said Guyon. "Make it something stiffer."

"Good man!" said Oddie. "I'll go see about breakfast."

Guyon sat in Oddie's wing chair thinking, thinking.

"It's not only Sutcliffe I have to handle, but Colonel Flowerday, too. He's more dangerous than the other. Has her at a terrible disadvantage there in his house. Pulling the loving father business. Well, I'll show him up. She can't hate and despise me any more than she does already. By God! I'll spoil the colonel's game, whatever it costs me!"

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**



# The Outcast

By E. F. BENSON

WHEN Mrs. Acres bought the Gatehouse at Tarleton, which had stood so long without a tenant, and appeared in that very agreeable and lively little town as a resident, sufficient was already known about her past history to entitle her to friendliness and sympathy. Hers had been a tragic story, and the account of the inquest held on her husband's body, when, within a month after their marriage, he had shot himself before her eyes, was recent enough, and of as full a report in the papers as to enable our little community at Tarleton to remember and run over the salient grimness of the case without the need of inventing any further details (which, otherwise, it would have been quite capable of doing).

Briefly, then, the facts had been as follows:

Horace Acres appeared to have been a heartless fortune hunter; a handsome, plausible wretch, ten years younger than his wife. He had made no secret to his friends of not being in love with her, but of having a considerable regard for her

more than considerable fortune. But hardly had he married her than his indifference developed into violent dislike, accompanied by a mysterious, inexplicable dread of her.

He hated and feared her, and on the morning of the very day when he had put an end to himself he had begged her to allow him, by the commission of some technical cruelty, followed by desertion, to obtain his divorce. It was, of course, in his power to commit this cruelty and to leave her; but for some reason which did not come out at the inquest, and which his widow averred was quite inexplicable to her, the mere fact of leaving her would not be enough for him; what he desired was the dissolution of the marriage.

She, poor soul, had refused to grant him this, for, as corroborated by the evidence of friends and servants, she was utterly devoted to him, and stated, with that quiet dignity which distinguished her throughout this ordeal, that she hoped that he was the victim of some miserable but temporary derangement, and would come to his right mind again.

He had dined that night at his club, leaving his month-old bride to pass the evening alone, and had returned between eleven and twelve that night in a state of vile intoxication. He had gone up to her bedroom, pistol in hand; had locked the door, and his voice was heard screaming and yelling at her. Then followed the sound of one shot.

On the table in his dressing room was found a half sheet of paper, dated that day, and this was read out in court. "The horror of my position," he had written, "is beyond description and endurance. I can bear it no longer; my soul sickens . . ." The jury, without leaving the court, returned the verdict that he had committed suicide while temporarily insane; and the coroner, at their request, expressed their sympathy and his own with the poor lady, who, as testified on all hands, had treated her husband with the utmost tenderness and affection.

For six months Bertha Acres had traveled abroad, and then in the autumn she had bought the Gatehouse at Tarleton, and settled down to the pleasant and absorbing trifles which make life in a small country town so busy and strenuous.

Our modest little dwelling is within a stone's throw of the Gatehouse, and when, on the return of my wife and myself from two months in Scotland, we found that Mrs. Acres was installed as a neighbor, Madge lost no time in going to call on her. She returned with a series of pleasant impressions.

Mrs. Acres, still on the sunny slope that leads up to the table-land of life which begins at forty years, was extremely handsome, cordial and charming in manner, witty and agreeable, and wonderfully well-dressed. Before the conclusion of her call Madge, in country fashion, had begged her to dispense with formalities, and instead of a frigid return of the call, to dine with us quietly next day. Did she play bridge? That being so, we would just be a party of four, for her brother, Charles Alington, had proposed himself for a visit.

I listened to this with sufficient attention to grasp what Madge was saying, but what

I was really thinking about was a chess problem which I was attempting to solve. But at this point I became acutely aware that her stream of pleasant impressions dried up suddenly, and Madge became stonily silent.

She shut speech off, as by the turn of a tap, and glowered at the fire, rubbing the back of one hand with the fingers of another, as is her habit in perplexity.

"Go on," I said.

She got up, suddenly restless.

"All I have been telling you is literally and soberly true," she said. "I thought Mrs. Acres charming and witty and good-looking and friendly. What more could you ask from a new acquaintance? And then, after I had asked her to dinner, I suddenly found, for no earthly reason, that I very much disliked her. I couldn't bear her."

"You said she was wonderfully well-dressed," I permitted myself to remark. "If the queen took the knight—"

"Don't be silly," said Madge. "I am wonderfully well-dressed, too. But behind all her agreeableness and charm and good looks I suddenly felt there was something else, which I detested and dreaded. It's no use asking me what it was, because I haven't the slightest idea. If I knew what it was, the thing would explain itself. But I felt a horror, nothing vivid, nothing close, you understand, but somewhere in the background."

"Can the mind have a 'turn,' do you think, just as the body can, when, for a second or two, you suddenly feel giddy? I think it must have been that. Oh, I'm sure it was that. But I'm glad I asked her to dine. I mean to like her. I shan't have a 'turn' again, shall I?"

"No, certainly not," I said. "If the queen refrained from taking the knight—"

"Oh, do stop your silly chess problem," said Madge. "Bite him, Fungus."

Fungus, so called because he is the son of Humor and Gustavus Adolphus, rose from his place on the hearth rug, and, with a hoarse laugh, nuzzled against my leg, which is his way of biting those he loves. Then the most amiable of bulldogs, who has a passion for the human race, lay down

on my foot and sighed heavily. But Madge evidently wanted to talk, and I pushed the chessboard away.

"Tell me more about the horror," I said.

"It was just horror," she said; "a sort of sickness of the soul—"

I found my brain puzzling over some vague reminiscence, surely connected with Mrs. Acres, which those words mistily evoked. But next moment that train of thought was cut short, for the old and sinister legend about the Gatehouse came into my mind as accounting for the horror of which Madge spoke. In the days of Elizabethan religious persecutions it had, then newly built, been inhabited by two brothers, the elder of whom, to whom it belonged, had mass said there every Sunday. Betrayed by the younger, he was arrested and racked to death.

Subsequently the younger, in a fit of remorse, hanged himself in the paneled parlor. Certainly there was a story that the house was haunted by his strangled apparition dangling from the beams, and the late tenants of the house—which now had stood vacant for over three years—had quitted it after a month's occupation, in consequence, so it was commonly said, of unaccountable and horrible sights.

What was more likely, then, than that Madge, who from childhood has been intensely sensitive to occult and psychic phenomena, that atmosphere that lies so close about our common material life that often we breathe it unawares, should have caught, on that strange wireless receiver which is characteristic of "sensitives," some whispered message?

"But you know the story of the house," I said. "Isn't it quite possible that something of that may have reached you? Where did you sit, for instance—in the paneled parlor?"

She brightened at that.

"Ah, you wise man!" she said. "I never thought of that. That may account for it all. I hope it does. You shall be left in peace with your chess for being so awfully brilliant."

I had occasion, half an hour later, to go to the post office, a hundred yards up High

Street, on the matter of a registered letter which I wanted to dispatch that evening. Dusk was gathering, but the red glow of sunset still smoldered in the west, sufficient to enable me to recognize familiar forms and features of passers-by.

Just as I came opposite the post office there approached from the other direction a tall, finely built woman, whom, I felt sure, I had never seen before. Her destination was the same as mine, and I hung on my step a moment to let her pass in first. Simultaneously I felt that I knew, in some vague, faint manner, what Madge had meant when she talked about a "sickness of the soul."

It was no nearer realization to me than in the running of a tune in the head to the audible external hearing of it, and I attributed my sudden recognition of her feeling to the fact that, in all probability, my mind had subconsciously been dwelling on what she had said, and not for a moment did I connect it with any external cause. And then it occurred to me who, possibly, this woman was.

She finished the transaction of her errand a few seconds before me, and when I got out into the street again she was a dozen yards down the pavement, walking in the direction of my house and of the Gatehouse. Opposite my own door I deliberately lingered, and saw her pass down the steps that led from the road to the entrance of the Gatehouse.

Even as I turned into my own door the unbidden reminiscence which had eluded me before came out into the open, and I cast my net over it. It was her husband who, in the inexplicable communication he had left on his dressing-room table, just before he shot himself, had written "my soul sickens."

It was odd, though scarcely more than that, for Madge to have used those identical words.

Charles Alington, my wife's brother, who arrived next afternoon, is quite the happiest man whom I have ever come across. The material world, that perennial spring of thwarted ambition, physical desire and perpetual disappointment, is practically un-

known to him. Envy, malice, and all uncharitableness are equally alien, because he does not want to obtain what anybody else has got, and has no sense of possession, which is queer, since he is enormously rich. He fears nothing, he hopes for nothing, he has no abhorrences or affections, for all physical and nervous functions are in him in the service of an intense infinitiveness.

He never passed a moral judgment in his life; he never wants to explore and to know. Knowledge, in fact, is his entire preoccupation; and since chemists and medical scientists probe and mine in the world of tinctures and microbes far more efficiently than he could do, since he has so little care for anything that can be weighed or propagated, he devotes himself absorbed and ecstatically to that world that lies about the confines of conscious existence.

Anything not yet certainly determined appeals to him with a call of a trumpet; he ceases to take an interest in a subject as soon as it shows signs of assuming a practical and definite status. He was intensely concerned, for instance, in wireless transmission, until Signor Marconi proved that it came within the scope of practical science, and then Charles abandoned it as dull.

I had seen him last two months before, when he was in great perturbation, since he was speaking at a meeting of Anglo-Israelites in the morning to show that the Scone Stone, which is now in the coronation chair at Westminster, was for certain the pillow on which Jacob's head had rested when he saw the vision at Bethel; was addressing the Psychical Research Society in the afternoon on the subject of messages received from the dead through automatic script; and in the evening was—by way of a holiday—only listening to a lecture on reincarnation.

None of these things could, as yet, be definitely proved, and that was why he loved them. The intervals when the occult and the fantastic does not occupy him he is, in spite of his fifty years and wizened mien, exactly like a schoolboy of eighteen, back on his holidays and brimming with superfluous energy.

I found Charles already arrived when I

got home next afternoon, after a round of golf. He was betwixt and between the serious and the holiday mood, for he had evidently been reading to Madge from a journal concerning reincarnation, and was rather severe to me.

"Golf!" he said, with insulting scorn. "What is there to know about golf? You hit a ball into the air—"

I was a little sore over the events of the afternoon.

"That's just what I don't do," I said. "I hit it along the ground."

"Well, it doesn't matter where you hit it," said he. "It's all subject to known laws. But the guess, the conjecture—there is the thrill and the excitement of life. The charlatan with his new cure for cancer, the automatic writer with his messages from the dead, the reincarnationist with his positive assertions that he was Napoleon or a Christian slave—they are the people who advance knowledge. You have to guess before you know. Even Darwin saw that when he said you could not investigate without a hypothesis."

"So what's your hypothesis this minute?" I asked.

"Why, that we've all lived before, and that we're going to live again here on this same old earth. Any other conception of a future life is impossible. Are all the people who have been born and have died since the world emerged from chaos going to become inhabitants of some future world? What a squash, you know, my dear Madge!

"Now, I know what you're going to ask me. If we've all lived before, why can't we remember it? But that's so simple! If you remembered being Cleopatra, you would go on behaving like Cleopatra, and what would Tarleton say? Judas Iscariot, too! Fancy knowing you had been Judas Iscariot! You couldn't get over it; you would commit suicide, or cause everybody who was connected with you to commit suicide from their horror of you.

"Or imagine being a grocer's boy who knew he had been Julius Cæsar! Of course sex doesn't matter; souls, as far as I understand, are sexless—just sparks of life, which are put into physical envelopes, some



male, some female. You might have been King David, and poor Tony here one of his wives."

"That would be wonderfully neat," said I.

Charles broke out into a loud laugh.

"It would indeed," he said. "But I won't talk sense any more to you scoffers. I'm absolutely tired out, I will confess, with thinking. I want to have a pretty lady to come to dinner and talk to her as if she was just herself and I myself, and nobody else. I want to win two and sixpence at bridge with the expenditure of enormous thought. I want to have a large breakfast to-morrow and read the *Times* afterward, and go to Tony's club and talk about creps or golf or Irish affairs and peace conferences, and all the things that don't matter one straw!"

"You're going to begin your program to-night, dear," said Madge. "A very pretty lady is coming to dinner, and we're going to play bridge afterward."

Madge and I were ready for Mrs. Acres when she arrived, but Charles was not yet down. Fungus, who has a wild adoration for Charles, quite unaccountable, since Charles has no feeling for dogs, was helping him to dress; and Madge, Mrs. Acres and I waited for his appearance.

It was certainly Mrs. Acres whom I had met last night at the door of the post office, but the dim light of sunset had not enabled me to see how wonderfully handsome she was. There was something slightly Jewish about her profile; the high forehead, the very full-lipped mouth, the bridged nose, the prominent chin, all suggested rather than exemplified an Eastern origin. And when she spoke she had that rich softness of utterance, not quite hoarseness, but not quite of the clear-cut distinctness of tone which characterizes northern nations. Something Southern, something Eastern.

"I am bound to ask one thing," she said when, after the usual greetings, we stood round the fireplace, waiting for Charles. "Have you got a dog?"

Madge moved toward the bell.

"Yes, but he shan't come down if you dislike dogs," she said. "He's wonderfully kind, but I know—"

"Ah, it's not that," said Mrs. Acres. "I adore dogs. But I only wished to spare your dog's feelings. Though I adore them, they hate me and they're terribly frightened of me. There's something anticainé about me."

It was too late to say more. Charles's step clattered in the little hall outside, and Fungus was hoarse and amused. Next moment the door opened, and the two came in. Fungus came in first.

He lolloped in a festive manner into the middle of the room, sniffed and snored in greeting, and then turned tail. He slipped and skidded on the parquet outside, and we heard him bundling down the kitchen stairs.

"Rude dog," said Madge. "Charles, let me introduce you to our neighbor, Mrs. Acres. My brother, Mrs. Acres—Sir Charles Alington!"

Our little dinner table of four would not permit of separate conversations, and general topics, springing up like mushrooms, wilted and died at their very inception. What mood possessed the others I did not at that time know, but for myself I was only conscious of some fundamental distaste of the handsome, clever woman who sat on my right and seemed quite unaffected by the withering atmosphere. She was charming to the eye, she was witty to the ear, she had grace and gracefulness, and all the time she was something terrible.

But by degrees, as I found my own distaste increasing, I saw that my brother-in-law's interest was growing correspondingly keen. The "pretty lady" whose presence at dinner he had desired and obtained was enchanting him. Not, so I began to guess, for her charm and her prettiness, but for some purpose of study, and I wondered whether it was her beautiful Jewish profile that was confirming to his mind some Anglo-Israelitish theory, whether he saw in her fine brown eyes the glance of the seer and the clairvoyant, or whether he divined in her some reincarnation of one of the famous or the infamous dead.

Certainly she had for him some fascination beyond that of the legitimate charm

of a very handsome woman. He was studying her with intense curiosity.

"And you are comfortable in the Gatehouse?" he suddenly rapped out at her, as if asking some question of which the answer was crucial.

"Ah, but so comfortable," she said. "Such a delightful atmosphere. I have never known a house that *felt* so peaceful and homelike. Or is it merely fanciful to imagine that some houses have a sense of tranquillity about them and others are uneasy and even terrible?"

Charles stared at her a moment in silence before he recollected his manners.

"No, there may easily be something in it, I should say," he answered. "One can imagine long centuries of tranquillity actually investing a home with some sort of psychical aura perceptible to those who are sensitive."

She turned to Madge.

"And yet I have heard a ridiculous story that the house is supposed to be haunted," she said. "If it is, it is surely haunted by delightful, contented spirits."

Dinner was over; Madge rose.

"Come in very soon, Tony," she said to me, "and let's get to our bridge."

But her eyes said: "Don't leave me long alone with her."

Charles turned briskly round when the door had shut.

"An extremely interesting woman," he said.

"Very handsome," said I.

"Is she? I didn't notice. Her mind, her spirit, that's what intrigued me. What is she? What's behind? Why did Fungus turn tail like that? Queer, too, about her finding the atmosphere of the Gatehouse so tranquil. The late tenants, I remember, didn't find that soothing touch about it!"

"How do you account for that?" I asked.

"There might be several explanations. You might say that the late tenants were fanciful imaginative people, and that the present tenant is a sensible, matter-of-fact woman. Certainly she seemed to be."

"Or?" I suggested.

He laughed.

"Well, you might say—mind, I didn't say so—but you might say that the—the

spiritual tenants of the house find Mrs. Acres a congenial companion, and want to retain her. So they keep quiet, and don't upset the cook's nerves!"

Somehow this answer exasperated and jarred on me.

"What do you mean?" I said. "The spiritual tenant of the house, I suppose, is the man who betrayed his brother and hanged himself. Why should he find a charming woman like Mrs. Acres a congenial companion?"

Charles got up briskly. Usually he is more than ready to discuss such topics, but to-night it seemed that he had no such inclination.

"Didn't Madge tell us not to be long?" he asked. "You know how I run on if I once get on that subject, Tony, so don't give me the opportunity."

"But why did you say that?" I persisted.

"Because I was talking nonsense. You know me as well enough to be aware that I am a habitual criminal in that respect."

It was indeed strange to find how completely both the first impression that Madge had formed of Mrs. Acres, and the feeling that followed so quickly on its heels was indorsed by those who, during the next week or two, did a neighbor's duty to the newcomer. All were loud in praise of her charm, her pleasant, kindly wit, her good looks, her beautiful clothes, but even while this Lob-gesang was in full chorus, it would suddenly die away, and an uneasy silence descended, which, somehow, was more eloquent than all the appreciative speech.

Odd, unaccountable little incidents had occurred, which were whispered from mouth to mouth till they became common property. The same fear that Fungus had shown of her was exhibited by another dog. A parallel case occurred when she returned the call of our parson's wife. Mrs. Dowlett had a cage of canaries in the window of her drawing-room. These birds had manifested symptoms of extreme terror when Mrs. Acres entered the room, beating themselves against the wires of their cage, and uttering the alarm note. She inspired some sort of inexplicable fear, over which we, as trained and civilized human beings, had

control so that we behaved ourselves. But animals, without that check, gave way altogether to it, even as Fungus had done.

Mrs. Acres entertained. She gave charming little dinner parties of eight, with a couple of tables at bridge to follow, but over these evenings there hung a blight and a blackness. No doubt the sinister story of the paneled parlor contributed to this.

This curious secret dread of her, of which, as on that first evening at my house, she appeared to be completely unconscious, differed very widely in degree. Most people, like myself, were conscious of it, but only very remotely so, and we found ourselves at the Gatehouse behaving quite as usual, though with this uneasiness in the background. But with a few, and most of all with Madge, this uneasiness by degrees grew into a sort of obsession. She made every effort to combat it, her will was entirely set against it, but her struggle seemed only to establish its power over her.

The pathetic and pitiful part was that Mrs. Acres from the first had taken a tremendous liking to her, and used to drop in continually, calling first to Madge at the window, in that pleasant, serene voice of hers, to tell Fungus that the hated one was imminent. Then came a day when Madge and I were bidden to a party at the Gatehouse on Christmas evening. This was to be the last of Mrs. Acres's hospitalities for the present, since she was leaving immediately afterward for a couple of months in Egypt. So, with this remission ahead, Madge almost gleefully accepted the bidding.

But when the evening came she was seized with so violent an attack of sickness and shivering that she was utterly unable to fulfill her engagement. Her doctor could find no physical trouble to account for this; it seemed that the anticipation of her evening alone caused it, and here was the culmination of her shrinking from our kindly and pleasant neighbor. She could only tell me that her sensations, as she began to dress for the party, were like those of that moment in sleep when somewhere in the drowsy brain nightmare is ripening. Something independent of her will revolted at what lay before her.

Spring had begun to stretch herself in the lap of winter when next the curtain rose on this veiled drama of forces, but dimly comprehended and shudderingly conjectured, but then, indeed, nightmare ripened swiftly in broad noon.

Charles Alington had again come to stay with us five days before Easter, and expressed himself as humorously disappointed to find that the subject of his curiosity was still absent from the Gatehouse. On the Saturday morning before Easter he appeared very late for breakfast, and Madge had already gone her ways. I rang for a fresh teapot, and while this was on its way, he took up the *Times*.

"I only read the outside page of it," he said. "The rest is too full of mere materialistic dullness—politics, sports, money market—" He stopped, and passed the paper over to me.

"There, where I'm pointing," he said. "Among the deaths. The first one."

What I read was this:

Acres, Bertha. Died at sea Thursday night, March 30, and by her own request, buried at sea. Received by wireless from P. and O. steamer Peshawar.

He held out his hand for the paper again, and turned over the leaves.

"Lloyd's," he said. "The Peshawar arrived at Tilbury yesterday afternoon. The burial must have taken place somewhere in the English Channel."

On the afternoon of Easter Sunday Madge and I motored out to the golf links, three miles away. She proposed to walk along the beach just outside the dunes, while I had my round, and return to the clubhouse for tea in two hours' time. The day was one of most lucid spring: a warm southwest wind bowled white clouds along the sky, and their shadows jovially scudded over the sand hills. We had told her of Mrs. Acres's death, and from that moment something dark and vague which had been lying over her mind since the autumn seemed to join this fleet of the shadows of clouds, and leave her in sunlight. We parted at the door of the clubhouse, and she set out on her walk.

Half an hour later, as my opponent and I were waiting on the fifth tee, where the road crosses the links, for the couple in front of us to move on, a servant from the clubhouse scudding along the road caught sight of us, and, jumping from his bicycle, came to where we stood.

"You're wanted at the clubhouse, sir," he said to me. "Mrs. Garford was walking along the shore, and she found something left by the tide. A body, sir. 'Twas in a sack, but the sack was torn, and she saw—It's upset her very much, sir. We thought it best to come for you."

I took the boy's bicycle and went back to the clubhouse as fast as I could turn the wheel. I felt sure I knew what Madge had found, and knowing that, realized the shock. Three minutes later she was telling me her story in gasps and whispers.

"The tide was going down," she said, "and I walked along the high-water mark. There were pretty shells. I was picking them up. And then I saw it in front of me. Just shapeless, just a sack—and then, as I came nearer, it took shape: there were knees and elbows. It moved, it rolled over, and where the head was, the sack was torn, and I saw her face.

"Her eyes were open, Tony, and I fled. All the time I felt it was rolling along after me. Oh, Tony, she's dead, isn't she? She won't come back to the Gatehouse? Do you promise me? There's something awful! I wonder if I guess. The sea gives her up. The sea won't suffer her to rest in it—"

The news of the finding had already been telephoned to Tarleton, and soon a party of four men with a stretcher arrived. There was no doubt as to the identity of the body, for though it had been in the water for three days, no corruption had come to it. The weights with which, at burial, it had been laden, must, by some strange chance, have been detached from it, and by a chance, stranger yet, it had floated and drifted to the shore closest to her home.

That night it lay in the mortuary, and the inquest was held on it next day, though that was a bank holiday. From there it was taken to the Gatehouse and coffined, and it lay that next night in the paneled parlor for the funeral.

Madge, after that one hysterical outburst, had completely recovered herself, and on Monday evening she made a nice little wreath of the spring flowers which the early warmth had called into blossom in the garden, and I went across with it to the Gatehouse. Though the news of Mrs. Acres's death and the subsequent finding of the body had been widely advertised, there had been no response from relations or friends, and as I laid the solitary wreath on the coffin, a sense of the utter loneliness of what lay within seized and encompassed me.

And then a portent, no less, took place before my eyes. Hardly had the freshly gathered flowers been laid on the coffin than they drooped and wilted. The stalks of the daffodils bent, and their bright chalices closed. The odor of the wallflowers died, and they withered as I watched. What did it mean, that even the petals of spring shrank and were moribund?

I told Madge nothing of this, and she, as if through some pang of remorse, was determined to be present next day at the funeral. No arrival of friends or relations had taken place, and from the Gatehouse there came none of the servants. They stood in the porch as the coffin was brought out of the house, and even before it was put into the hearse, had gone back again and closed the door. So, at the cemetery on the hill above Tarleton, Madge and her brother and I were the only mourners.

The afternoon was densely overcast, though we got no rainfall, and it was with thick clouds above, and a sea mist drifting between the grave stones, that we came, after the service in the cemetery chapel, to the place of interment. And then—I can hardly write of it now—when it came for the coffin to be lowered into the grave, it was found that by some faulty measurement, it could not descend, for the excavation was not long enough to hold it.

Madge was standing close to us, and at this moment I heard her sob.

"And the kindly earth will not receive her," she whispered.

There was awful delay: the diggers must be sent for again, and meantime the rain had begun to fall thick and tepid. For

some reason—perhaps some outlying feeler of Madge's obsession had wound a tentacle round me—I felt that I must know that earth had gone to earth, but I could not suffer Madge to wait. So, in this miserable frame, I got Charles to take her home, and then returned.

Pick and shovel were busy, and soon the resting place was ready. The interrupted service continued, the handful of wet earth splashed on the coffin lid, and when all was over, I left the cemetery, still feeling, I knew not why, that all was *not* over. Some restlessness and want of certainty possessed me, and instead of going home, I fared forth into the rolling, wooded country inland, with the intention of walking off these batlike terrors that flapped around me. The rain had ceased, and a blurred sunlight penetrated the sea mist which still blanketed the fields and woods, and for half an hour, moving briskly, I endeavored to fight down some fantastic conviction that had gripped my mind in its claws. I refused to look straight at that conviction, telling myself how fantastic, how unreasonable it was, but as often as I put out a hand to throttle it, there came the echo of Madge's words: "The sea will not suffer her; the kindly earth will not receive her."

And if I could shut my ears to that, there came some remembrance of the day she died, and of half forgotten fragments of Charles's superstitious belief in reincarnation. The whole thing, incredible though its component parts were, hung together with a terrible tenacity.

Before long the rain began again, and I turned, meaning to go by the main road into Tarleton, which passes in a wide-flung curve some half mile outside the cemetery. But as I approached the path through the fields, which, leaving the less direct route, passes close to the cemetery and brings you by a steeper and shorter descent into the town, I felt myself irresistibly impelled to take it. I told myself, of course, that I wished to make my wet walk as short as possible, but at the back of my mind was the half-conscious, but none the less imperative, need to know by ocular evidence that the grave by which I had stood that afternoon had

been filled in, and that the body of Mrs. Acres now lay tranquil beneath the soil.

My path would be even shorter if I passed through the graveyard, and so presently I was fumbling in the gloom for the latch of the gate, and closed it again behind me. Rain was falling now thick and sullenly, and in the bleared twilight, I picked my way among the mounds, and slipped in the dripping grass, and there in front of me was the newly turned earth. All was finished: the grave diggers had done their work and departed, and earth had gone back again into the keeping of the earth.

It brought me some great lightening of the spirit to know that, and I was on the point of turning away when a sound or stir from the heaped soil caught my ear, and I saw a little stream of pebbles mixed with clay trickle down the side of the mound above the grave: the heavy rain, no doubt, had loosened the earth. And then came another, and yet another, and with terror gripping at my heart, I perceived that this was no loosening from without, but from within, for to right and left the piled soil was falling away with the press of something from below. Faster and faster it poured off the grave, and even higher at the head of it rose a mound of earth pushed upward from beneath.

Somewhere out of sight there came the sound as of creaking and breaking wood, and then through that mound of earth there protruded the end of the coffin. The lid was shattered: loose pieces of the boards fell off it, and within the cavity there faced me white features and wide eyes. All this I saw, while sheer terror held me motionless; then, I suppose, came the breaking point, and with such panic as surely man never felt before, I was stumbling away among the graves, and racing toward the kindly human lights of the town below.

I went to the parson who had conducted the service that afternoon with my incredible tale, and an hour later, he, Charles Alington, and two or three men from the undertaker's were on the spot. They found the coffin, completely disinterred, lying on the ground, by the grave, which was now three-quarters full of the earth which had fallen back into it. After what had hap-

pened, it was decided to make no further attempt to bury it; and next day the body was cremated.

Now it is open to any one who may read this tale to reject the incident of this emergence of the coffin altogether, and account for the other strange happenings by the comfortable theory of coincidence. He can certainly satisfy himself that one Bertha Acres did die at sea on this particular Thursday, and was buried at sea; there is nothing extraordinary about that. Nor is it the least impossible that the weights should have slipped from the canvas shroud, and that the body should have been washed ashore on the coast by Tarleton—why not Tarleton, as well as any other little town near the coast?—nor is there anything inherently impossible in the fact that the grave, as originally dug, was not of sufficient dimensions to receive the coffin.

That all these incidents should have happened to the body of a single individual is odd, but then the nature of coincidence is to be odd. They form a startling series, but unless coincidences are startling, they escape observation altogether. So, if you reject the last incident here recorded, or account for it by some local disturbance, an earthquake, or the breaking of a spring just below the grave, you can comfortably recline on the cushion of coincidence.

For myself, I give no explanation of these

events, though my brother-in-law brought forward one with which he himself is perfectly satisfied. Only the other day he sent me, with considerable jubilation, a copy of some extracts from a medieval book on the subject of re-incarnation which sufficiently indicates his theory. The original work was in Latin, which, mistrusting my scholarship, he kindly translated for me. I transcribe them exactly as he sent them to me. The reader will probably guess whom the word "he" refers to. This is the translation:

Gnostic literature gives us two certain instances of his reincarnation. In one his spirit was incarnated in the body of a man, in the other, in that of a woman, fair of outward aspect, and of a pleasant conversation, but held in dread and in horror by those who came into more than casual intercourse with her. She, it is said, died on the anniversary of his death, but of this I have no certain information. What is sure is that when the time came for her burial, the kindly earth would receive her not, but, though the grave was dug deep and well, it spewed her forth again. Of the man in whom his cursed spirit was reincarnated, it is said that being on a voyage when he died, he was cast overboard with stones to sink him, but the sea would not suffer him to rest in her bosom, but slipped the weights from him, and cast him forth again on to the coast. How be it when the full time of his expiation shall have come and his deadly sin forgiven, the corporal body, which is the cursed receptacle of his spirit, shall at length be purged with fire, and so he shall, in the infinite mercy of the Almighty, have rest, and shall wander no more.

U U U

## A CLOTHES CALL

I BOUGHT some clothes, and, truth to tell,

It very soon occurred to me

That suit was made, alas! to sell—

The test of gullibility!

The trousers sadly want repairs,

They are not what they should have been;

My cry is now, "Tears, idle tears!"

I know exactly what they mean.

So, come, my spouse, with finger sheath,

Come, partner of my joys and woes,

Come, armed like Curtius to the teeth,

And bid the yawning chasms close!

*La Touche Hancock.*



# Magnificent Folly

By OLIVE McCLINTIC JOHNSON

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE BREAKING HEART.

THE horses had wandered from where Knox had left them. Crossing the road, he circled back through the trees almost to the foot of the hill before he found them. He captured the reins of the browsing animals, and was turning to lead them up the slope, when he heard the girl's quick exclamation. He had not realized he was so near. He dropped the bridles and peered through the undergrowth.

The sight that met his gaze was burned long afterward on his memory. A man stood beside Iris in an attitude of calm assurance, and the girl rested her hand on his arm and looked up in his face with eagerness.

Knox could scarce believe his eyes. Was

this some trick that was being played upon him? It had been only a matter of moments since she had proclaimed him her king of hearts, and now— Who was this man who received her caresses and pleading so calmly? As he looked, the man turned so that the dying rays of the sun fell across his face.

Oily Duke!

Knox clenched his hands threateningly, and a great wave of fury swept over him. That man! His *bête noire*! Must he always be the victim of Oily Duke? First, to be despoiled of his fortune, then through him so nearly to lose his friend and his own life, and now his sweetheart. It was too much!

He was all for charging down upon the enemy, when a second thought shattered his belligerency. To his first hot jealousy there succeeded a sense of perplexity. What

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of Iris? If she favored the man's advances, and her attitude showed that she did, there was nothing left for him save acquiescence. But Oily Duke! It was inconceivable. His reason recoiled from the thought. He looked again.

Iris seemed to be yielding, and Duke, after a satisfied shrug, was making off in the opposite direction, emphasizing the compact, whatever it was, with an admonitory gesture.

What did it mean? Knox told himself that it was all his foolish imagining—that the girl he loved was too fine, too good, too clever for an alliance with the detested Oily Duke. Then, like a horrid dream, came the thought of her hesitancy at setting a date for their wedding. A spasm of pain overspread his face. It was true! That which he had considered light teasing he now set down as fixed resolution.

With a shudder he retraced his way to the horses. As in a maze he took the trailing bridles and led the animals back in the same circuitous detour he had made in his search for them. He wanted time to think. In this way it was some time before he appeared at the top of the hill. He came slowly toward Iris across the field of blue-bonnets.

When he neared her he searched her face in silence. There was nothing in it to betray the scene through which she had passed. She greeted him with a gay smile, which he had no way of knowing was forced, and took the bridle from his hand. She patted Sweetheart's soft muzzle, and, with Knox's assistance, vaulted into the saddle. Obeying an impulse to feel the mare's fleet gait, she called a challenge to a race, and was off like a flash. Knox's horse bounded after. Neck and neck they reached the top of the hill and tore along the woodland road. Out again in the open, past the disputed oil wells guarded by State Rangers, up a slope until they came to Ninety-Four, where Knox had fallen, and here the girl drew rein.

Knox should have known that his fears were groundless from the look of pain which overspread her face as her eyes measured the distance from the crow's nest to the platform and she revisualized the accident

that had befallen him. Had he been possessed of a woman's intuition he would have known, too, that there was suffering behind the drawn lips and tense eyes of the girl; but he was a man, and his mental processes were mathematical.

One idea possessed him and drove away all others—he had been thwarted again by Oily Duke. He was all but certain of it. Nevertheless, he could not refrain from making one last appeal to Iris. Though he was convinced of her perfidy, he would give her an opportunity to dispel his doubts. And, oh, how his happiness hung upon her answer!

"Iris," he said, breaking the silence, "will you keep your promise?"

The girl looked up quickly. "What promise?" she asked innocently. She had forgotten the teasing compact.

"I brought the horses, you know," reminded the youth simply.

"Oh," said she quickly, her mind flooded with recollection.

"Will you set the day for our wedding, dear?" he went on with infinite tenderness.

A stab of pain smote her to the heart, and her eyes were averted from his pleading face. She steeled herself to the necessary answer. After a long silence it came.

"No," she almost whispered.

A bleak look came into Knox's eyes. The reply was scarcely a surprise to him, but he forced himself to continue the conversation to a proper conclusion.

"Why?" he asked, though he was confident he knew the answer.

"I—I—"

"Why, Iris?" he insisted.

The girl dropped her face to the sheltering curve of her arm. "Don't—oh, don't!" she sobbed.

But Knox would have his answer. He steeled himself against her tears and again called her name, more sternly than she had ever heard him speak.

"Iris!"

The brave girl dropped her hand from her face and looked up. There was resolution to match his own in her countenance, albeit her eyes were lambent.

"I can't—I can't—oh, I can't!" she declared, seeking courage in reiteration.



"You mean—you've—changed your mind?" he faltered, his resolution suddenly gone. He could not bring himself to link her name with Oily Duke's, as he had intended.

She stole a glance in his direction, and a wave of pity smote her. His face was devastated with emotion like a landscape beset with a gale. Iris could not trust her voice. She closed her eyes and nodded helplessly.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A STRANGE DISEASE UNVEILED.

CHARLIE tried his best to be a model patient, but lying idle irked him, and sometimes he broke over. Mrs. Dowdy indulged these lapses as the vagaries of a sick man, and gave them no more concern than the wind that upset the vase of wild flowers on the center table, or the April rain that took the starch out of the week's wash drying on the line. She endured Charlie's grumbling with the same good-humored composure with which she restored the flowers and the starch. There was one theme, however, upon which Charlie could not be reconciled or silenced, and Mrs. Dowdy was bound to hear him through. This was criticism of herself—of making a "doormat" of herself, as Charlie put it.

The argument took many forms, and Mrs. Dowdy agreed that she was usually "bested," which destroyed none of her complacency nor changed her attitude one iota. One day, however, Charlie thought he made a dent in her armor.

The kindly little woman had concocted a special delicacy for the patient—prune whip. She tripped into the sick room, bearing the confection proudly, her face alight with anticipatory appreciation. But Charlie's appetite was negligible. Besides, he did not like prune whip, or prune anything else. Prunes were his particular aversion.

Once, on the ranch, he had inaugurated a "prune strike" among the punchers and led it to a successful conclusion, whereby the cook eliminated prunes from the daily "chuck," so plainly he was not one to

relish the tabooed food as a sick room delicacy. But Mrs. Dowdy did not know this, and it was not in Charlie's heart to tell her; he merely said that he was not hungry.

"But, Charlie, you don't know how good 'tis!" cried the little woman in dismay.

Charlie turned a commiserating look upon the dish, then his eyes took in her disappointment.

"Put it on the table," he directed kindly. "Maybe I'll eat it later."

Mrs. Dowdy, satisfied, drew the table near the bed and placed the dish upon it. Then she stood for a moment looking in sympathy at Charlie's emaciated face.

"No need to ask you how you feel," she fibbed. "Anybody can see how you're pickin' up. We'll have you out in a few days."

"Maybe you will, and maybe you won't," grumbled Charlie. "I ain't feelin' none too good to-day."

"Pshaw, Charlie! You're as chipper as a sparrer. I don't reckon I'll be able to cook enough to fill you up by this time next week."

Young Willy had followed his mother into the room, and stood eying the prune whip with longing. He was at the vacuum age—never quite filled. Watching Charlie and his mother out of one eye, he furtively poked an exploring finger into the dish and withdrew a gob of the confection.

The sick man saw the marauding act, and resented it. Charlie resented almost everything that Willy, a small replica of his father, did.

"Here you, Bill!" he exclaimed. "Keep your dirty paws outa that!"

Mrs. Dowdy turned quickly, and at the sight of the young freckle-faced scion smiled indulgently.

Willy weighed the smile against the sick man's frown, and drew a proper conclusion.

"Ma, gimme some o' that there!" he demanded, sucking a gooey finger.

Mrs. Dowdy would have yielded, had the confection been her own, but she had already passed the title to Charlie and Charlie said not a word.

"Ma, gimme!" pleaded Willy.

Mrs. Dowdy hesitated, then, with a conciliatory glance at Charlie, cut the Gordian knot.

"Yes, take it, Willy. Charlie says he ain't hungry now, and I'll make him ~~some~~ <sup>more</sup> this evenin'."

With a wild whoop Willy seized the bowl in both hands and darted out of the room. Now, Charlie had not wanted the prune whip; quite to the contrary, he had scorned it. But he had not counted on resigning his claims to the spoiled boy; it irritated him provokingly.

"Did you ever stop to think you're doing that boy an injustice, indulgin' him that-away?" he began fretfully.

"Why, Charlie?"

"Because he will be just the kind of man that you're learnin' him to be as a boy—irresponsible and selfish and lazy. You oughta control him and discipline him better."

"I want him to be happy," smiled Mrs. Dowdy, fluffing up the invalid's pillows.

"That's just it!" snapped Charlie, shaking his finger. "You're layin' up the biggest stock of unhappiness it's possible for a man to have. He can't always have his mother with him to indulge him and protect him. You ought to learn him self-reliance, woman."

There was truth in Charlie's assertion, and Mrs. Dowdy did not combat it.

"I do try, Charlie," said she.

The sick man was now fairly launched on his theme.

"And another thing," he went on, forgetting that the only kind of criticism a mother cares to hear about her child is praise, "the kid's so darned egotistical!"

Mrs. Dowdy gasped, but Charlie continued, unheeding.

"You've always led him to believe he was the most important human on the globe—that what he done was right, and what he wanted he had to have. That ain't no way to raise a boy—the age of tyrants and kaisers is past. Learn him," continued Charlie, as if he were the austere apostle admonishing the Ephesians, "that he's as good as anybody else, but no better; and that if he wants anything, first let him prove that he deserves it and can afford it."

"That's so hard, Charlie," spoke the indulgent mother.

"Hard? The devil! It's a hard world he's got to live in, ain't it? Now, supposin' he grows up like you've started him—a egotistical, selfish, spineless jellyfish of a man! You won't be here always to protect him, and the world will swat him at every corner. Bill goes on, blamin' everybody but himself for his hard luck. One day he meets a girl that he loves and 'wants to marry."

"Inspired by your teachin', he up and marries her, not because he deserves her or can afford a wife, but because he wants to! Ain't that hell?" concluded Charlie. "Why, even you, Miz Dowdy, can see what the outcome will be. The girl may love him ever so much at first, but if the young gent don't meet the responsibilities he assumed when he married her, her love will change to disgust."

"Charlie," Mrs. Dowdy laughed nervously, "this is awful funny. You talkin' about marriage and such—you bein' a bachelor and all."

"Well, I can tell you a heap about marriage, even if I have been a bachelor all my life," Charlie declared, and went on to prove it. "I've noticed a man, consciously or unconsciously, gives his wife the same consideration his mother had, and Bill here, seein' you the head of your family always, will be perfectly satisfied to have his wife support him. And," finished Charlie, "supportin' an able-bodied man ain't no woman's job! With all respect to you, Miz Dowdy."

"You surprise me, Charlie."

"Well, I'm as full of surprises as a prize box, and I could go on for a week, but it won't do no good, and I reckon I might as well save my wind. But I want to say this," he added earnestly. "You think you're doing your duty, and, looking at it one way, you are a brave woman, and I honor you—mighty few women would do what you're doing—but can't you see that as long as you *will* do it you'll *have* to? Dowdy will let you!"

Charlie had reached his real objective. He raised himself on one elbow to give emphasis to his words.

"Strike, woman, strike! Show a little spunk! You owe it to yourself and your children. Besides, you ain't got no right to be the means of unhappiness that you're layin' up for Bill and the girl that he will marry some day."

Mrs. Dowdy wiped her eyes. "Dowdy's a good man, Charlie."

"Hell!" roared Charlie. "What's the use of being good if you're good for nothing?"

Mrs. Dowdy, realizing that there was nothing to be gained by opposing the aroused man, asked soothingly: "What would you do if you was me, Charlie?"

The modern Apostle Paul was ready with an answer.

"The next time Dowdy comes whinin' around and wantin' you to give him money, lam him over the head with a stick of stove-wood and tell him to go and earn his money."

"He ain't right well, Charlie."

"What's the matter with him?" thundered Charlie.

"He's got the epizootic—"

"He ain't no such! I know all about that disease—nobody but horses has it."

"What-t!" came from the incredulous Mrs. Dowdy.

"It's the truth," reiterated the plain-man. "I've doctored many a one." He looked at her with a comical expression of commiseration. "You've been took in, woman. There ain't nothin' the matter with Dowdy that work won't cure. And you owe it to him and yourself and the children to apply the remedy." The sick man dropped back on his pillow, with an air of having completed a thankless as well as useless task.

Mrs. Dowdy's next words surprised him. "I'll think about what you've said, Charlie, and—do my best," she added.

Charlie looked up approvingly. "Angels couldn't do no wuss!" he applauded.

Mrs. Dowdy continued, in a way that showed Charlie's revelation had impressed her profoundly. "I never knowed nothin' about that horse disease," she said slowly.

"Sure! I knew it! You're easy. Heap o' thing you don't know, Miz Dowdy," said Charlie in a self-satisfied tone. "Now

I feel better. I feel like I could eat something."

"What could you eat?" asked Mrs. Dowdy eagerly. "Some milk toast?"

"Naw," returned the invalid with a wry face. "I'd relish some real vittles—fat bacon and black-eyed peas and some corn bread. If you've got a bowl of clabber I'll drink it too—and some doughnuts and molasses."

Mrs. Dowdy held up her hands aghast. "And to think," she said to herself, as she went to prepare the banquet, "he begrudged Willy a little bowl of prune whip!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### AN OPEN SEASON ON CONFESSIONS.

THE estrangement of Iris and Knox had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that each was crushed. Their woe was engulfing—the more so because it bore the aspect of hopelessness. Because of the third person involved—the sinister trail of the serpent Duke—neither divulged the secret. This was their foolish mistake, of course, for a little publicity might have cleared the situation.

But the old adage held true, and love was never blinder. It was as if each had taken a vow of reticence, and Knox added to his obligation the pledge of renunciation. He was sadly missed at Mrs. Dowdy's.

Charlie's new wheel chair had come, and Dowdy was pushing him up and down the front porch. Mrs. Dowdy had suggested the service as a means of dispelling Charlie's foolish belief that the man was lazy, and Charlie had been obliged to submit because every one else was busy. Iris was at her duties in the schoolroom and Mrs. Dowdy was occupied in the kitchen.

Charlie, who resented Dowdy's ministrations, grumbled.

"Where's Mike? I ain't seen him for a week."

"Mike's a busy man these days, Charlie," said Dowdy gravely.

"Yeah, I know he said the store was growin', but he hired a clerk a long time ago. And I can't see why he can't stick around like he uster."

"The Civic League takes a lot of his time. It meets almost every night, and we sure are bringing things to pass."

Charlie turned and looked into Dowdy's ineffectual face.

"Civic League? We?" he queried.

"Yes—that's our new law and order league that Mike started," explained Dowdy, assuming a look of importance. "Stringtown is on the up-grade. You wouldn't know it hardly. There ain't been a shootin' in a month, and for thievin' it's about stopped. Mike sure has cleaned up the town since he commenced to marshal it."

Charlie's face wore a look of utter bewilderment.

"Look here, Dowdy, I don't know as much about this as I know," he declared foolishly. "What do you mean—marshal and law and order—and what in hell's Mike got to do with it?"

"I clean forgot, Charlie. You been so sick we clean had a chanst to tell you nothin'." Dowdy hesitated before the task of explaining all that had happened during Charlie's lapse. Besides, he was growing weary of trundling the convalescent, and he wanted to stop and read the paper. His roving eyes fell upon Iris dismissing the pupils for the day.

"Come here, Miss Iris," he called. "You're the very one to tell Charlie about Mike and how he scared the daylights out of the whole Cottonwood dive."

Charlie gasped. There must be something in the man's foolish assertions, after all. His eager eyes invited Iris, who hesitated in the door.

"Yeah, tell him. I gotta go now," said Dowdy, slipping away.

There was no escaping the bitter-sweet task, and Iris began its poignant recital. She told Charlie the whole tale, omitting only her own part. Charlie listened with eyes that glowed, but his lifelong habit of repression permitted but few words of praise.

"You don't say!" burst from him finally, as Iris described the taking of Charlie's assailant. "He never done that, did he?"

When Iris reaffirmed her statement Char-

lie went on with heightened color: "The young rooster—it's just like him! Dog-gone his hide, he never will learn no sense!"

But Iris would listen to no disparagement of her lover.

"Hush, Charlie! You know you are as proud of him as you can be. We all know how you love him. Why, you and he are the *Damon* and *Pythias* of the oil field—everybody says so."

"Them that's up on book learnin'," amended Charlie teasingly. "Heap of 'em ain't as well read as you and me, Iris." He slapped his knee. "*Damon* and *Pythagoras*," he repeated happily."

"They all appreciate him, anyway," declared Iris. "You haven't heard the best yet. Everybody went wild, and you never could guess what they did. Try, Charlie. Guess what Stringtown did."

"There ain't no tellin' what the stinkin' hole done," admitted Charlie.

"The town incorporated," said Iris, "and elected him city marshal!"

"No-o?" said Charlie.

"Yes, they did! And guess what they call him?" she went on with mounting enthusiasm.

"I haven't no idy," said the wondering Charlie.

"'Hell and Repeat!'" quoted the laughing Iris.

"Whoop-ee!" Charlie's enthusiasm burst all bounds. He slapped his hands on his emaciated knees and tried to execute a Texas Tommy, sitting in the wheel chair, while he emitted a series of cowboy "yips" and "yows."

His appreciation would have been ludicrous had it not been so genuine. Iris, knowing the sterling worth of the plainsman, saw nothing but beauty in his devotion to the man she loved. She suddenly felt a great temptation to relate the whole tale to Charlie, to unburden herself of the secret that was stealing the roses from her cheeks and the glad light from her eyes.

But not just yet was her vow of reticence to be broken, for Charlie had pre-empted the confessional rôle for himself. Iris could scarce believe her ears.

"Iris," he began, "I reckon you think I'm a plumb fool about Mike. And I reckon I don't miss it far, that's a certainty. But don't nobody, not even you, know what he's meant to me."

Charlie hesitated with a strong man's difficulty at finding words for his own deep feelings.

"I never had no folks—my mother died before I can remember, and my daddy was killed in a drunken fight, so I just growed up spontane-yus, as Miz Dowdy would say." He laughed with a sudden whimsicality. "The man that raised me had nine children, and he and his wife and every last one of them kids chewed tobacco, except the baby—"

Iris's face expressed her feelings.

"And it never had no teeth!" finished Charlie mirthfully.

"Was that on the ranch?" asked Iris, laughing with him.

"Yes—the Three X's. I reckon you've saw it on my watch chain," and he pointed out the X X X to the girl.

Charlie had purposely introduced the interlude to save his story from becoming too sad. He went on:

"I cleared out for myself as soon as I was able, but I was awful lonesome. Lord, I reckon you don't know how lonesome a fellow can get out on the plains and not die. Of course, I knew lots of men, but they wasn't the right sort—not the kind to help a fellow get anywhere—they never learned me nothin' but cussin' and drinkin' and gamblin'. If I'd ever cared about a woman it might 'a' been different, but I never. I always felt like my face would burn up and set my hair on fire when I talked to one. So I herded with a rough bunch.

"That's the way it was when Mike come along. Life was mighty tame to me, and I was follerin' a straight course to the devil. I never cared for nothin', and I'd 'a' been ruind before now, but with his funny foolishness he kept me off the street and out of temptation.

"I never had nobody to care whether I done right or wrong before, but he took an interest and made me feel it—without exactly tellin' me so—and that's the grand-

est and most steadyin' thing in the world, to know that somebody does care. Of course, I'm nothin' but a hard-boiled grass-hopper, but—"

Charlie stopped abruptly, suddenly bereft of words by a striking phenomenon. A tear had fallen on his hand. He looked up in surprise, and saw in Iris's face the source of the supply. To the girl Charlie's homely tale had lost its comic element and was dignified by pathos. Her eyes were brimming lakes.

Charlie felt a peculiar helplessness.

"Don't cry, Iris. Please don't," he pleaded.

At his words the flood broke, and the lakes were inundated.

"Now, see what I've done! I reckon I'm the blunderingest fool—"

"Hush, Charlie," she sobbed. "It isn't you. It's me," she added ungrammatically.

The artless plainsman hastened to reassure her. "Nobody blames you," he declared magnanimously. "Of course, you fell in love with him. And that's what I'm coming to—I don't mind. I used to think I couldn't bear for Mike to marry, because— Well, women's my *bait-no-war*, he says. But I don't mind you, Iris. I don't. In fact, I'm right glad." He patted her hand reassuringly. "That's what I started out to tell you. You can have him. I give him to you, free and willing."

The irony of it! In the stress of the amazing situation Iris could repress her feelings no longer.

"Oh—oh! You don't know. He doesn't know. He wouldn't want me. Oh, Charlie, I am so unhappy!" She dropped her head, and her frame was shaken with weeping.

Charlie looked at her, dumb with surprise. Here was another matter about which he was sure he "didn't know as much as he knew." He stroked her hand in silence.

Perhaps it was the happiest remedy he could have devised to assuage the storm, for, unimpeded, it soon spent its force, and the girl, soothed by the gentleness of his touch, yielded presently to placidity. She withdrew her hand and wiped her tears.

"I'm such a goose!"

"You're a sweet woman, Iris. It's a

wonder to me Mike ain't run off with you before now."

Thus to the issue again. The girl renewed her protestations.

"He couldn't—he wouldn't— Oh, Charlie, it is all over between us!"

It was out at last.

Charlie looked at her in amazement.

"What!" he blurted. He knew that this was some kind of a lovers' quarrel, and he felt that it must be adjusted somehow. He wrinkled his brow in thought. Charlie was to assume a new rôle.

He, who had by the severest renunciation given his consent to the wedding, now felt that it was his most ardent wish. Furthermore, it devolved upon him to bring it about. He, who had been matrimony's scoffer, became its proponent.

"What's this?" he repeated. "You ain't broke off with Mike?"

Iris nodded.

"Now, ain't that too bad!" He frowned in perplexity. How to account for it? Mike was probably to blame. He'd settle with the young man—making Iris cry that way. Yes, he'd treat him like a Dutch uncle—the young scapegrace. Still, he felt there must be some extenuation. Charlie determined to get at the heart of it.

"Look here, Iris—most men are fools when it comes to understandin' women, and I don't reckon Mike is no exception. Now, you haven't got no brother or nothin', so just let me play like I'm your brother—I always wanted a sister. If there's any little thing Mike's done to hurt your feelin's, or if he needs to be set right about something, you let me know, and I'll tend to him."

There was a wealth of honest purpose in the proposal, and Iris looked at him with warming eyes, but she shook her head sadly.

"He has not done anything, Charlie, and there isn't anything you can do. It's—it's hopeless."

"As bad as that?" drawled Charlie. "Well, I ain't inquisitive or nothin', but if you could bring yourself to tell me I'd be proud to hear it. Because, as long as I've lived, I ain't never seen or heard of nothin' yet that was absolutely hopeless."

Iris looked up quickly and searched his face. "For shame, Charlie. You are making fun."

"I ain't no such!" Charlie protested stoutly. "You don't think I'd be as mean as that, do you? But I am consumed with curiosity. What's up betwixt you and Mike?"

"You will promise not to tell?"

"Tell who? Him?"

"Him, most of all!" emphasized the girl.

"Wal, I reckon I can keep one secret from him."

"But you must promise," insisted Iris.

Charlie deliberately moistened a finger of his left hand and held it beside one of his right. "This is wet and this is dry; cut my throat if I tell a lie," said he gravely.

Thus assured, Iris began her recital. She told Charlie the whole miserable tale. When she came to Oily Duke's threats against her lover, Charlie said:

"Don't worry none about what the snake says he'll do. He talks too much, Iris. You needn't never be very much exercised about a fellow that threatens all the time. That kind of guy uses up his strength talkin'. It's the man who holds his tongue and burns powder quick that's dangerous. And as for Oily Duke, my guess is he'll spend a heap o' time lettin' Mike alone from now on—me, too, if he's wise," he added with a scowl.

But it was when Iris spoke of the worthless oil stock which Duke had sold her lover, and declared her intention of paying back the money, that Charlie made his most emphatic protest.

"Now, Iris, you don't want to do nothin' of the kind! Mike ain't goin' to hold that against you. Why, he wouldn't hold it against you if it had been you that sold him the stock, instead of this off-color brother of yours. Men are like that about the women they love. They don't never think about 'em in terms of money and business. A woman means home and rest and poetry to her lover. You can pay him back lovin' him."

Iris looked at Charlie gratefully, but her eyes were full of trouble. "Don't you see that I can't marry him until I have reme-

died the wrong that Orville has done him and his mother? But for that, Charlie, they would have their money—Mike never would have lost his arm—he would have stayed at home—”

“Yeah, and missed his Rainbow Girl!” interrupted Charlie, unconvinced.

Iris's face brightened with the ghost of a smile, but she shook her head sadly. “She had set her mind upon the sacrifice, and no matter how much her heart pleaded, her head would not be convinced.

“Look here!” said Charlie, aroused almost to the point of exasperation. “You're so straight you bend a little! Mike ain't botherin' about that stock. It's love he wants, not money. Besides, he sold the stock. It ain't his now. I bought it from him 'way last fall.”

“You?” interrupted Iris. “Then that explains how it happened to be in your pocket. Oh, Charlie, it was a valuable paper, after all!”

And she told him the part the stock certificate had played in his own near-tragedy.

“That's the first I heard of it,” said he. “Looks like I hear something new about that fight every day. I'll get it all pieced out after a while. That certificate! Then it was worth all I paid for it!” Charlie chuckled, recalling the penny he had paid for the stock. “Where is the dang paper? I'd like to see it.”

When she brought it, and he had satisfied his curiosity regarding the small bullet prints on its folds, he handed it back to her.

“Here, Iris, I'm going to give this to you. Take it and see what it brings you. It's a lucky paper, as sure as you're alive, for it brought Mike his girl, it protected my life, and there's no telling what you'll get out of it. Here; put it away and forget all this foolishness about paying him back. You remind me of that mutt you read about—that Spaniard that fought the windmills and such. I don't want to hear no more about it.

“And another thing—I want things fixed up betwixt you and Mike, so's I can see his grinning face around here again. How do you expect me to get well when you two are unhappy?” Charlie finished petulantly.

“Here he comes now,” said Iris, as a well-remembered form came swinging down the street. “I—I have to go.”

“Hold on,” said Charlie, seizing her hand. “I ain't ready for you to go yet.”

“Yes—yes, I must!” And Iris, blushing hotly, tore her hands from Charlie's grasp and darted away.

He looked after her with a comical expression of bewilderment.

“Gosh, women's funny!” said Charlie.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FROM A DARKENED WINDOW.

KNOX had absented himself from Mrs. Dowdy's as long as he could. The renunciation which he had imposed upon himself had required all his resolution. Although he could deny himself the physical presence of Iris, he could not banish her bright figure from his mind. He went about his duties with dreams of her in his heart, and sometimes she seemed so vividly present that he almost found himself calling her name.

Finally he could endure the strain no longer. He told himself that he must go to Mrs. Dowdy's merely for the appearance of things. Charlie and the others would take it amiss if he stayed away any longer. He ascended the steps and beld out his hands to Charlie. He had seen the girl dart away at his approach, but he allowed no note of disappointment to mar his greeting.

“Charlie! My, you are looking fine, old man!”

His friend, gazing after the fleeing Iris, turned at the words, and answered with undisguised pleasure:

“Hello, Mike! Where you been keeping yourself?”

Knox ignored the reproach in the words, and went on:

“You'll be coming back to the store soon, won't you?”

“Yeah; I was figgerin' on going back to-day if you didn't come,” fibbed Charlie. “It's the only way I can get a glimpse of you. Give an account of yourself. How do I know but what you've embezzled the

cash register and run off with the bull picture?"

He looked at his partner with a fond expression.

"Not quite as bad as that," laughed Knox, "but I've had a lot to do. I'm the lord high executioner now, you know." He hummed the familiar tune from "The Mikado," with its jolly lilt of foolishness.

"Yeah—they told me about you gettin' yourself elected," drawled Charlie. "How did you do it, you young scamp—stack the ballot box?"

"Perhaps—and by voting early and often myself."

Charlie's heart glowed at the pleasant banter. It was this that he had missed most during his convalescence. He sighed happily.

"Wal, I aim to be out and ridin' in a few days, and then you'll have something to do, Mr. Marshal, keepin' me out o' trouble. Your office won't be such a siney-cure." His eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Charlie!" reproved Knox.

"It means rest cure," grinned Charlie, proud of his use of the unusual term. "You see, I've been improvin' my mind, me and Iris—"

"Iris?" faltered Knox.

"Yeah, that sorrel girl that teaches school here," explained Charlie with *naïveté*. "Stick around and I'll introduce you sometime," he added ironically, meanwhile studying the face of the youth furtively.

Knox said nothing. He seemed to be in a kind of abstraction, from which Charlie was forced to arouse him.

"Rub that frown off your face, Mike!" he commanded abruptly. "It don't look right."

Knox came back with a visible effort. "Was I frowning? Weight of responsibility, old man. 'Uneasy crowns the head that wears a rest,' and all that, you know."

The forced note of gayety was apparent to Charlie. He looked at his partner with eyes full of sympathy. There was no concealing his own feelings. Charlie was as transparent as a mountain stream.

"Sit down and stay a while," he invited, while he was preparing himself in his effort at mediation.

Knox took off his cap and surveyed it ruefully before crowding it into his pocket. "Guess I'll have to rest my head with a different crown," he went on jocularly. "Have to get me a broad-brimmed Stetson—nothing like dressing the part. Tell me," he broke off suddenly, as he pointed to the star adorning his front. "How do you like my insignia of office?"

"Star-spangled mutt!" ejaculated Charlie.

"Eh, what?"

"That's what I said," repeated Charlie. "Anybody that would act like you do about a girl!"

If Knox was surprised he did not betray it.

"I get you, Charlie. I suppose I must have seemed rather foolish to you—to let sentiment interfere with business—but it's all over now."

Charlie said not a word, but listened patient as a stone.

"Yes, you were right," the young man continued. "I've thought a lot about what you said about the diverting influence of women, and—well, from now on you need have no fears about me. You've been awfully patient, Charlie, and I'm free to tell you that hereafter I shall have but two interests—the store and affairs—of State," he finished with an attempt at jocularly.

"State Lunatic Asylum!" broke from Charlie.

"What!" Knox looked up quickly.

"Just what I said!" exploded Charlie furiously. "You oughta be there and locked up in a padded cell, you young damn fool, raving maniac!"

It was Knox's turn for blank amazement. Never did he recall, having seen Charlie so vehement. And his words were wholly without meaning. He wondered if Charlie's illness had not temporarily unbalanced him. With something of the kind in mind he attempted soothing.

"There, there, Charlie," said he, rising hastily. "You'll be all right in a moment. You—"

"I never will be all right, I tell you," retorted Charlie, "until you get married!"

"My Heavens!" said Knox, sitting down weakly.



Charlie glowered at him from repelling brows.

"Do you think I want to stall around here forever, without no young nieces and nephews to play with, and call me 'Uncle Charlie' and tease me into learnin' 'em how to swing a lariat and ride Sweetheart?" he demanded. "I tell you, Mike," he went on accusingly. "You ain't got no cause to deprive me of my little pleasures thataway! I've got some rights, haven't I?" he wanted to know truculently.

Knox was speechless with the suddenness of Charlie's reversal.

"But, Charlie—" he managed to gasp when the plainsman cut him off with a continuance of his amazing preaching.

"A fellow ain't no good till he's married. Look at me!" he thundered, by way of example.

"But, Charlie, I thought you were opposed to matrimony?" Knox managed to interpose humbly.

"Well, a fellow can change his mind, can't he?"

"Yes, but—"

"But, nothing! I tell you, Mike, you ain't got a leg left to stand on—as for Iris—"

"Iris!"

"Yeah, the way you two are actin' up makes me sick! Here I've been a-countin' on dancin' at your weddin' and the both of you fly the coop. It ain't right, I tell you. It ain't fair to me."

Knox was beginning to recover his poise.

"Charlie," said he, rising. "I am sorry to disappoint you, but I cannot marry Iris even to please you. And it would not be right to let her make the sacrifice, even if she were willing, when her heart is somewhere else." He almost whispered the last words, and his eyes were clouded with pain.

Charlie shook his head with a peculiar, baffled movement. His Dutch-uncle lecture had been a complete failure.

"Look here!" said he with a final effort. "You're plum' loco, both of you. Iris's heart is all right. She thinks—" He broke off, suddenly remembering his promise to the girl. "Hell! I reckon I don't know as much about this as I know," he finished lamely.

"I imagine you don't, Charlie," said Knox, thinking of Oily Duke. "So drop it. It's hopeless." He turned toward the street. It was easier to go than to stay.

Charlie gave up. He had been confronted with the same "hopeless" declaration by each of the principals, and he was beginning to wonder if he had not at last encountered a situation that was really hopeless.

Upstairs, Iris was confident of the same thing. From her darkened window she watched Knox retrace his way up the street. The sight distressed her. She had not seen him since the day they romped together in the field of bluebonnets, and the reality of his presence had set her tumultuous emotions to surging.

He had gone without seeing her! The loneliness of it! Could she return again to the bleakness of the last few days? The time had seemed impossible to go through without seeing him. The desolation of his absence had invested her like a pall, and Stringtown, without his bright presence, seemed sordid and repelling. She thought of him hourly, picturing him in a hundred well-remembered poses. She recalled the splendor of his smile, his rare frown, his tender glance, his ease and grace.

She recreated many pictures from memory—the times they walked together, the afternoon they heard the bird, in the store, on the swaying ladder, under the trees. With the eye of devotion she revisualized each loved feature—his fine forehead topped with amber lovelocks, the straight nose, arched lips and laughing blue eyes—the whole Hellenic face. Then, with a sob, she saw herself as she had been on the night of their betrothal, caught up for a brief time into another world.

Iris, in an abandonment of despair, dropped to the rocking chair, which kind-hearted Mrs. Dowdy had insisted upon providing for her comfort. She rocked furiously, in a vain effort to keep pace with her tumultuous feelings.

The crumpled stock certificate was in her hands. Grimly she reviewed the task she had set herself to do—complete restitution of the money. Ten thousand dollars. It was hopeless. It would mean a lifetime of toil. Her lover was lost to her forever.

Gone was her bright dream of the future. She arose abruptly from the swaying chair and threw herself across the bed in an abandonment of despair.

In the hall outside she heard some one approaching. It was Mrs. Dowdy probably. Iris loved the garrulous little woman, but she now felt that she could not meet Mrs. Dowdy's searching eyes or endure her chatter. There came a knock at the door. Her defences were all down. She would simulate sleep. She closed her eyes and relaxed her head on her arm. Again came the knock. Iris lay motionless. The knob turned and Mrs. Dowdy came in. Iris could feel her glance, but she knew the kind-hearted woman would not disturb her sleep. She drew a long, deep breath. Mrs. Dowdy purposed out and gently closed the door.

The girl sat up, smiling through her tears at the success of her small deception. Her satisfaction was short-lived, however. Her eyes fell upon the chair where she had sat. What ailed the foolish thing? She looked closely, forcing her wandering attention upon it. Then a look of dismay overspread her face. The chair still rocked!

In a moment her sense of humor triumphed.

"Oh, me!" she laughed. "I do the most foolish things!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SMOLDERING FIRES.

STRINGTOWN was in the throes of a moral renaissance. The vigorous settlement never did things by halves. Even, as in an earlier day it had been notorious as the worst place on the map, it now gave signs of becoming the most circumspect. Knox did not believe in blue laws, but the thoroughly aroused citizenry demanded a clean sweep, so he made no objection to the strict moral censorship imposed, but his chief concern centered in the Cottonwood dive. Here, he felt, was the monster offender, and he bent his energies to pulling its fangs.

The particular curse of the oil fields was thievery. Costly supplies and machinery, unless constantly guarded, disappeared with

annoying persistency. The pilfering annoyed Charlie more than all else, now that he was up and about his duties again.

"Danged if I don't believe some o' these thieves would steal a hot stove!" he complained. "Mike, let's get 'em to pass a law makin' thiev'in', hangin'!"

The law, as finally passed, was scarcely as drastic as Charlie proposed, but it was severe. The situation in oil development resembled that of the early cattle industry in Texas—a man might escape punishment for murder, but a penitentiary sentence loomed for the rustler of a yearling.

There was no legislating against the Cottonwood dive, however, so Knox had organized the youth of the settlement into a kind of law and order league, the avowed purpose of which was to curb lawlessness in general, and the activities of the notorious resort in particular. These various influences were beginning to exert a restraint upon the offenders and lawlessness was becoming less bold.

It was this law and order league which Dowdy had mentioned to Charlie and the avowal of his participation in it that had so surprised the convalescent. Dowdy failed to mention that the activities of the league had been so directed against idleness and loafers in general that he had felt it expedient to ally himself with the organization. He acted as doorkeeper for the order. This was by day. By night he was watchman for a drilling outfit. Charlie had suggested the occupation and Dowdy had not dared refuse. Dowdy was on the upgrade toward reform.

There was another matter besides thievery which annoyed Charlie. During his illness the boundary matter had progressed only so far as the appointment of a receiver by the Federal government—something that neither side desired, but each must bear with equanimity. The receiver had taken charge of the wells and all material within the disputed territory. Commandeering the latter was particularly vexing to Charlie, for his company had thousands of dollars' worth of drilling material on the ground there. It was not only inactive, but was deteriorating rapidly. Oil field supplies were difficult to obtain, and Charlie attempted

to remove the outfit to a new location. He met a stern refusal. Charlie pleaded the dire need of it by his company, pointing out the delay the work had suffered on account of his illness and now the hindrance by lack of material. The receiver was adamant against his petitions. Charlie threw up his hands in disgust at his first encounter with red tape.

"If it was in the old days," he reflected aloud, "I wouldn't be bluffed by no receiver! But, with Mike representin' the law"—he hesitated—"I don't reckon—No, that wouldn't do at all." He sighed as he replaced his six-gun. This moral renaissance had its disadvantages.

The Cottonwood dive, although outwardly quiescent at the efforts directed against it, seethed with indignation. The institution had never ceased to resent the successful coup of Knox, and the smoldering fires of animosity threatened to burst into flames at any moment. This new law and order league was an added affront. It had hurt the business and the proprietors had endured the upstart movement longer than they liked.

Oily Duke never missed a chance to anathematize the situation. He had a double purpose in fanning the flames of resentment, for, besides his grudge against Knox, his funds were running low. Consequently, he planned a revenge of double purpose. Pearl helped him to scheme. When the plans were complete Duke took the others into his confidence. He was very adroit in leading up to the issue. The small house group was gathered forlornly in the temple of chance, and Cady Steele bewailed the situation with blasphemous disdain.

"There's no more money to be made in the Cottonwood. If this keeps up I swear I'll be going to church as a last resort!"

"What for, Cady?" asked Pearl, who sat with her arm thrown around Oily Duke.

Cady showed a row of tobacco-stained teeth in an unpleasant grin. "In hopes of getting a chance at the collection plate. Darn that cuckoo Knox's Law and Order League!"

Pearl nudged Oily Duke, and he asked: "How much longer you going to stand it, Cady?"

Cady Steele spread his ineffectual hands and gave his shoulders a shrug. "What can a man do? He's the popular idol now, and when he says 'frog,' everybody hops."

"If you could put something over on him and get everybody to laughing at him," suggested Duke.

"Oh, certainly. If—"

"It wouldn't be hard with drilling conditions as they are."

"What do you mean?" asked Cady, giving him a curious look. "I'd hate to see you bumped off."

"Nonsense. Since the government has come in and tied up so much machinery, the way is clear," declared Duke. "Drilling outfits were hard enough to obtain before, but there's such a shortage now that machinery and pipe are almost legal tender."

"Yes, I know all about that," returned Cady dryly. "I seen Charlie Renfro almost in tears, pleading with the new receiver to let him have that extra rig of the Winning Wager's rusting out there on the disputed land."

"That's just it," averred Duke. "Now if we organized a gang, made a raid on some of the wells, tore down the machinery and hauled it off, right under this poppycock marshal's nose—on top of the government nuisance—it would cause a big outcry, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would," agreed Cady without enthusiasm. "But the cottonwoods would be bearing a new kind of fruit if you tried it. We never could swing it," he finished, "with all the guarding that's being done."

"It would be as easy as anything," persisted Duke with a smile, from which mirth was entirely eliminated. "Now, listen!"

The group drew their chairs closer, and Oily Duke unfolded his plan. It must have been a good one, for, presently, looks of approval began to overspread faces that had worn looks of skepticism. After a while Cady leaned across and brought his hand down on Duke's knee with a slap.

"By ganny! It's a peach of a scheme! It ought to ruin him!"

"Yes, and bring us much beautiful money besides," added Duke with an avaricious gleam in his eyes. "We will rush the ma-

chinery across the State line and sell it at a premium. They tell me those operators in the Keyes field are crying for pipe."

"There'll be a howl go up here, too!" chuckled one.

"A howl with vengeance, I hope!" snarled Duke.

"Oh, fellows, I have it!" exclaimed Pearl. "Here's poetic justice! Why not steal one of Charlie Renfro's rigs?"

"That bullwhacker?" objected Cady.

"Sure," said Pearl, flashing her showy teeth at him. "He's Knox's pal and started all this mess."

The men exchanged swift glances.

The small, round, beady eyes of Oily Duke took on an added gleam.

"The very thing!" said he, giving Pearl an approving pat.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE HEAVENS CRASH.

IT was a gala occasion in Stringtown. Iris's small school was having its closing exercises. All the patrons attended with their friends and neighbors, many families coming from the shacks and tents on the outskirts. A school "exhibition" was reminiscent to many of old cherished scenes in the past when they themselves had worn the tarleton and tinsel and declaimed sonorously of the Italy that lies beyond the Alps. It was, in a way, a harking back to civilization.

Iris had carefully trained the children in their parts. There were to be speeches, songs, and drills. The schoolroom was entirely inadequate to accommodate the throng, and a platform had been erected in the yard. This had been inclosed with a calico curtain, strung on wires, and two small boys had been intrusted with the drawing of the curtain, back and forth, as the different exercises demanded. The audience was to sit on roughly devised benches, surrounding the platform. The whole scene was lighted by two gas torches, extended from a near-by drill rig.

All of these arrangements had been effected by Mrs. Dowdy. The capable little woman, feeling a responsibility akin to Iris's,

had eagerly taken charge of the rough detail, leaving the finer task of training the pupils to the girl. Mrs. Dowdy had borrowed the lumber from a well-drilling outfit and commandeered the services of the male boarders in building the platform. The curtain she had made on her own sewing machine, and the lights, by the help of Charlie, had been boldly filched, as she said, "off" the Winning Wager.

The exercises were to begin at sunset. It was the time of day most loved by Iris; besides, this would permit the lengthy program to be performed before the children grew sleepy and admit of the final dance by the grown-ups, which the boarders had teased Mrs. Dowdy into arranging as a climax.

Knox and Charlie, in festal attire, mounted their horses and rode in the direction of Stringtown. Gladly would Knox have remained away from the festivities, but Charlie had pooh-poohed the idea. Here he was, according to Charlie, in the equivocal position of standing for the uplift of the settlement and trying, at the same time, to absent himself from the most important cultural function Stringtown had ever attempted. It was preposterous. As an official, it devolved upon him to encourage the effort with his presence. He ought—Knox had held up his hands in capitulation, and proceeded to array himself in his best. But his heart was not in it. He felt that the desolation that already existed in his heart would be increased by the sight of Iris.

As they rode, a gorgeous panorama was unfolding in the western sky. A silver sun behind blue-gray clouds shot diverging rays, in the shape of geometric figures, toward the earth—perfect isosceles triangles were they—and the lines of light scintillated as if diamonds were being drawn up and down their slender lengths.

The impressive view was heightened by the vast land perspective furnished by the prairie, just as a sunset at sea is made more beautiful because of the water perspective.

Charlie, who never so much as glanced at scenery, did not notice the phenomenon until Knox called his attention to it.

"Yeah," he said, squinting his eyes toward the west, "the sun's drawin' water."

"It reminds me of a sunset at sea," reflected the young connoisseur.

"That's on account of the prairie," said Charlie. "You oughta see the plains—they're so flat they seem to rise away from you in every direction. Makes you feel like you're down in a hollow."

"Just as it does at sea," flashed the youth. "I never knew until I crossed the ocean the meaning of the term 'high seas.' The prairies are almost a counterpart."

He swept his eyes over the landscape with pleasure. The Indian pinks were in full bloom and the fire of their fringed blossoms was so lit by the dying sun that the prairie was transformed into a field of the cloth of gold. The picture was a solace. The harsh details of the day had begun to take on the soft and luminous glow of night. Knox drew a deep breath of near-contentment. He was surprised to meet Charlie's apprehensive glance.

"'Twill rain before morning," said the plainsman, practical as his partner was poetic.

The program was in progress. Mrs. Dowdy had reserved two seats for her favorites, and Charlie accepted his with a mumbled word of appreciation, but Knox was too restless to be seated. The elevation of his previous mood had been but temporary, and he found himself yielding to an unaccountable depression. He moved uneasily about the outskirts of the gathering. He longed for a glimpse of Iris, yet dreaded to meet her direct gaze. Presently he saw her flitting back and forth behind the scenes, her hands full of bright-colored ribbons. With hungry eyes he took in her beauty and grace. Hers was the proud stateliness of the born aristocrat of the South—just the way she moved among the throng was impressive. And yet—she had preferred the contemptible Oily Duke to himself. He turned away. Something cold and repellent gripped his heart.

He wandered blindly, and Iris, at that moment seeking a youthful performer, met him face to face. She smiled a little tremulously as their eyes met, and he blurted a conventional "Good evening."

"It is a lovely night," said she, glancing at the star-strewn sky.

"Yes, but it will rain before morning," mechanically replied Knox.

"That will be nice—we need rain—I mean, I hope it will wait until the exercises end—" She became a little incoherent as they thus thoroughly reviewed the weather.

Knox searched her face closely. Her starry eyes were very soft and very sad. With a faint sigh she looked away. Then, catching sight of the recalcitrant performer, she ran to bring him for the waiting exercise. Knox looked after her desolately.

Presently, the children were on the stage, grouped for the grand finale. This was a Maypole dance employing the whole school. The Dowdy youngsters were all three cast for stellar parts. Babe and Toots stood in the center and the youthful Willy led the group who pirouetted, with weaving ribbons, around them.

Mrs. Dowdy, her fond face flushed with pleasure, dropped into the seat beside Charlie, which he still reserved for his partner.

"It's lovely, ain't it, Charlie?"

"Pretty keen," admitted Charlie, watching the colorful picture of the platform.

"The whole exhibition's been a grand success. Miss Irish—Iris—sort of lost interest these last few weeks—I think it's the weather, it's been so hot and all—but, law, I took hold and told her not to worry about the arrangements—the platform or curtains or nothin'—I'd see to them. It would be enough for her just to get the children ready—"

Mrs. Dowdy was "hitting on all cylinders and going strong," as Charlie would have expressed it, but he was not paying much attention to her at that moment. His eyes were fixed severely upon the spectacle before him. The youthful Willy, laying out a course of his own diametrically opposed to that taught by Iris, had confused the other children, and the dance was in danger of being spoiled. Willy, unheeding the frantic signals of Iris, held his ribbon aloft and cavorted jubilantly in and out among the bewildered children. Charlie frowned and doubled his fists.

Mrs. Dowdy, unconscious of the entanglement on the stage, rippled on. "I don't think she's right happy, though—it may be my imagination, but—have you noticed

anything, Charlie?" She glanced up to meet the unheeding countenance of Charlie. Following his embittered gaze, she saw, for the first time, the situation on the stage—the confused children, Willy galloping complacently, and Iris, with flushed face, stepping from behind the scenes to untangle the snarl.

"Why, law," said Mrs. Dowdy. "All of 'em's out of step except Willy!"

Charlie turned and glowered at her indignantly. His feelings were beyond the stage of polite repression.

"Huh!" said he. "Bill's the very knock-kneed rascal that gummed it up!"

But there was no wounding Mrs. Dowdy's feelings. She, realizing that the program was all but ended, was hurrying away to provide for the dance. This was to take place within the schoolroom, and soon the crowd was surging toward the entrance.

The phonograph began to pour forth its enticing strains, and Charlie looked around for Knox. He found him peering through the window at the dancers. Iris had been surrounded immediately by an eager group, all clamoring for the first dance. She yielded to the claims of Stub Peters, and as Knox watched, the two floated by the window.

"Where you been?" asked Charlie at his elbow. "I saved a place for you all during the performance."

"The lights hurt my eyes," fibbed Knox.

"Lights nothin'!" scoffed Charlie. "I seen you watchin' that sorrel girl like a sick calf. Come on in and dance."

"No; I'll stay and watch the horses."

Charlie swore under his breath.

A flash of lightning zigzagged across the sky.

"See," said Knox. "It's going to storm. I'd better stay outside. You run along before the wind musses your hair."

"Ho-hum," yawned Charlie, pretending indifference. But Knox knew that he wouldn't have missed the dance for worlds, and presently he saw Iris teaching him the intricacies of a new step.

He turned away depressed. Everybody was enjoying the dance except himself—he who used to lead all the Germans back home and to whom the rhythmic steps came as easy as breathing. There were other girls

inside. He needn't have denied himself the pleasure of dancing because of his difference with Iris, but it did not enter his head to dance with any one else. He leaned against the post and gave himself up to the mysterious gloom that had assailed him all evening. He could not account for it—a strange premonition of impending danger.

The presence of a radiant form beside him shook him from his reverie. A hand rested gently on his arm and he turned and beheld a vision. Iris, with cheeks like rose petals, stood at his side imploring a dance.

Passing the door, she had caught a glimpse of him, his shoulders hunched in despondency, and a spring of pity, of affection, welled up in her. Answering the impulse, she stepped to his side and cautiously asked:

"Will you dance with me?"

Knox's pulse quickened and a hot flame suffused his face. He would have yielded in a moment, but a sudden perversity seized him.

"Why do you wish to dance with me?" he asked.

She flashed a look at him with eyes that spoke like music. Any one could have read their message of love—any one save the purblind boy.

"Why?" he insisted tenaciously.

Before the tenseness of his figure and the steadiness of his blue-gray eyes, the resolution of the girl wavered.

"I—I thought you were lonely," faltered poor Iris, plaintive as a child.

"You were mistaken," he answered crisply.

It was Iris's turn to blush, which she did. Imperious as a queen she turned, spoke a hasty apology and reentered the house.

Then it was that Knox hated himself thoroughly. Hot waves of anger swept over him and he would have given anything to undo his rudeness, his rebuff of the girl he loved. For he was fathoms deep in love with Iris. With a groan he recalled the hurt look in her night-blue eyes. How had he been able to do it?

He was beginning to learn that a man may hurt that which he loves best, though the reaction to such a passion is utter pain. No punishment which may come to such a

one is comparable to that which he metes out to himself. The sensitive person is his own castigator.

Thrice distilled was Knox's agony. Lashed by the scorpions of conscience, he hurled himself down the steps and out the yard.

He was fumbling at his horse's tether when a man rushed up flushed with excitement and seized his arm.

"Mike," said the man. "Where's Charlie? I'm scared something's wrong at the rig."

"What's that, Dowdy?" asked Charlie, stepping up. He had observed the brief conversation between Knox and Iris and had followed his partner's headlong flight.

"I dunno exactly," said Dowdy. "A fellow come with a gang and moved off the drillin' rig—"

"Moved the drillin' rig!" exclaimed Charlie.

"Yeah, he hauled it clean off in some wagons."

"What made you let him?"

"He said the rigs was too close together and the fire hazard was too great." Charlie swore softly. "I couldn't do nothin'," fal-

tered the ineffectual Dowdy; "he said he was an official."

"Who in hell was it?"

"He said he was the State fire marshal!"

Charlie's face was blank, but Knox was quick to fathom the mystery.

"A trick, evidently," he said.

"I never suspicioned nothin' at first—but afterward—the fellow was in such a hurry—it didn't look right. And I thought I'd better come and tell you," whined Dowdy.

Charlie was already in the saddle. "Dowdy, you're too darn timid! You'd drown in a spoonful of water," he said contemptuously.

"Fustest time nobody ever put nothin' over on me," bridled Dowdy, egotistically,

"We'll go swear out a warrant," suggested Knox.

"Warrant, nothin'!" snapped Charlie. "We gotta ride after 'em and get the stuff before they cross the State line."

A jagged flame of lightning lit up the heavens, then disappeared, leaving the earth darker by contrast. Charlie turned and wheeled into the darkness. Knox followed close after.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

U U U

## SEEKING A THRILL

I AM so weary of curls; gimme a jane with a pout;

I am so sick of the girls; show 'em the way to go out.

I'm so tired of their smiles; gosh! but they gimme a pain,

Testing their grins and their wiles—gimme 'em awkward and plain!

Gimme a dame with a frown—gimme a jane with a leer,

Every show-house in town shows 'em as foamy as beer.

Gimme a miss with a grouch, with hair like the Lord made it grow,

Then I'll unlimber my pouch and stay till the end of the show.

Gimme a girl as she is; gimme a maid with a limp—

Sadie or Susie or Liz—gimme a girl that's a simp.

Gosh! but I'm sore on janes who try to look like what they ain't,

Afraid to go out when it rains for fear they will rub off the paint.

Banish the kid with the eyes, give us a *she* for a whirl;

Slip us a pleasant surprise—give us a *natural* girl!

Miles Overholt.



# The Yangste Horde

By PHILIP M. FISHER, JR.

THE Society of Ancestral Loss cleaves with relentless ferocity to its law.

And that law demands the life of the man or woman on the ninth day after the branding of the ancestral tomb that marks upon the voluntary victim's breast its livid record of the sale of the soul within. Twice had I come into knowledge of the working of this law. Lieutenant Buckley, of the little gunboat Wilena, had told me of how he had first heard of the society. And after his warning, with my own eyes I had seen Tuck Cheong, on the ninth day, throw himself into the Sea of Ancestral Fire to atone for the barter of his soul, and to drown in the oblivion of the waters of the Yangste the remorse that gnawed at his heart.

Thus was the law carried out—even if not

by the society's relentless knife, at least by the operation in the victim's own mind of its inexorable demand.

The casual passenger on the ferryboat running past Alcatraz from the city of St. Francis to that of the Little Willow on the white bluffs on Marin remarks upon the twoscore lateened fishing craft beating through the Golden Gate. In Manila the tourist marvels at a hundred spider-legged bancas seemingly bent, under huge-bellied sail, for destruction on the rock of Corregidor. But in the ower Yangste even the imagination gasps for breath.

From forty miles south of the Saddle Group our column steered not so much to run a course as to avoid by countless zigzags the bamboo-buoyed fishing nets that



supplied the Yangste Valley with its most delectable food. From the Saddle Group to Gutzlaff Island the column broke, that sweating and clamorous sampan crews might live—and broke and broke again; then, in despair of any formation at all, came the flagship's signal for each ship to proceed independently.

But from Gutzlaff to the Tung Sha light vessel the captain himself stood at the engine room telegraphs, the chief quartermaster at the wheel. And the off-watch crew manned the life lines in utter astonishment at the ten times a thousand flapping sail that breasted the swirling coffee tide, and that made of all horizons a pulsing cloud of gray—uncounted fleets, armadas, of sampans and of junks—the Yangste Horde.

All through the banquet I had felt the power of his eyes. Or if not of the eyes alone, at least the power of the thing that lay behind and reached forth with its tentacular magnetism to grip the souls of men. Never before had I sensed so tangible a might.

Perhaps it made itself the more keenly felt and eerie because it was not directed against me or any other about the table. It was simply a presence in the room—a living, vibrant, and seemingly malignant currentlike spirit that impregnated all things. It dominated, too, not so much by active coercion as by the feeling it inspired that, although leashed in the man's restraint, it was ever in danger of breaking down the barriers of his will and consuming our very own.

He was introduced as the power behind the Chino-Asiatique Banking Corporation. From the moment I had felt the cool, strong clasp of his slim-fingered hand I knew that behind any cause he willed to espouse he must be a power indeed. Yet, at that, something dim within me roused in warning, and vaguely droned and droned that even as a friend the man must be feared. As an enemy—the thought could not abide.

I watched him covertly as the speeches were made. Without the slightest change of countenance he smoked cigarette after cigarette, and the neatness of his ash deposit in the carven silver of the tray on

the white damask before him gave evidence of the controlled order of his thoughts. Controlled order, and yet—if the power within him broke its bounds, would that order still be controlled? I wondered.

Then he was called upon to speak.

As his calm, resonant words, slow voiced, throbbed in the corners of the room, I felt again the thing behind his deep black and thinking eyes. He smiled once as he bowed in welcome to our ranking officer. His glance slowly swept over mine. I strove to meet it, and in that very striving was confession of my own comparative weakness. Ashamed, my eyes fell. I glanced up again, and it seemed that the crinkles about his own had deepened, as by a secret humor. I shook myself. This was foolishness! Childish! What was the man to me?

He said little beyond his word of welcome to our destroyers now moored in the Whampoa off the French Bund. Yet the applause, from the other Chinese guests, echoed and reëchoed in the room as it had for no other single speaker. He bowed with another flashing smile, then sat down. As gravely unperturbed as before, he accepted a cigarette from the consul, a match from the president of the Chino-Asiatique, and his first ash dropped in the same neat circle of the old.

In the midst of our own leader's reply a servant entered with wine, and as he passed Kung Wo Tai he stumbled slightly. In recovering he breathed an ejaculation in his native tongue. Kung Wo Tai gave no sign that he had heard, but dropped another ash on the silver tray. Yet when the applause had done he arose and excused himself—and as the Chinese guests stood erect as he left the banquet room, we, as courtesy demanded, arose as well.

The power behind the Chino-Asiatique Banking Corporation! Was that all? I wondered. They treated him as a god.

There are reaches of the Whampoa, as in the great river to whose ever-flowing vastness it contributes its little might, where the surface of the yellow water is ribbon smooth. Its motion is hardly perceptible, and even the gentle breezes from the

monotony of the horizon-seeking bottom lands cause not the slightest ripple of its composure.

One even doubts the wisdom of the sampan coolie, who, in order not to be swept past the ship moored in midstream, sculls far up the tawny ribbon's edge, then strikes straight out for the opposite shore. Yet, shortly, one understands.

For though the man strives for the perpendicular, he achieves the hypotenuse. The force of his oar is not the only one that acts upon his rocking craft. The buoyant surface beneath is alive with unseen resultants, and, as he sweats to cross, the current sweeps him down. Secretly he knows this, and takes advantage of it, although he never heard of euclid, and the geometric statement of a law of physics would be only hocus-pocus to conjure the machinations of devils.

But of devils he does know—and in them he does believe.

For he kens well what lies beneath the calm surface of the waters that give him wives and rice. Currents are there in which lie all manners of devils.

And well he knows that were he to slip from the platform of his sampan no power on earth could save him from the twisted arms that would seize him once the satin surface closed over his luckless form; seize him and drag him down, whirl him dizzily, batter him about, torment him, and finally, ten li downstream where the Whampoa devils disgorge their life-sucked prey, spin him to some yellow mud bank where the hand of man would dare not touch him, and only the carrion birds give him heed.

To the foreigner who has sensed the under things of China the ribbon surface of the river is but another Oriental face. And to one who has dwelt long enough in that land of peaceful paradox all superficial China warns of the same.

The streets of Shanghai are thronged with automobiles, shop windows are lit by electric globes, with the pressure of a hand man may speak with Peking, with the turn of a crank one may laugh at a funny fellow with a small black mustache, baggy trousers, an underdone derby hat and a rubber cane.

At second cockcrow a woman in her ricksha, unescorted, may be trotted happily from the Old French Club to her home across Soochow—though 'tis seldom done. At the fourth hour after noon a banker's clerk may carry an open tray of silver from Nanking Road to the Mandarin Tea Garden deep in the Native City, in his hand a cigarette, not a gun. The tourist, with new helmet and Malacca walking stick, sees what he might see in the dens of Yalu Road—and returns to the Astor House with a sigh that China isn't what she's cracked up to be!

But he has seen only the surface, as unruffled as the face of those quiet reaches of the Whampoa. Beneath are the currents.

Before the party broke up entirely I asked the American consul what manner of man was Kung Wo Tai. He looked at me with a peculiar twist in the corner of his mouth, then lit a cigarette.

"Why do you want to know?" he slowly asked.

I accepted his match, my eyes on his.

"On the surface he is the power behind the Chino-Asiatique Banking Corporation." I parried.

The consul shrugged his shoulders.

"Why go below the surface? Some men try that—and find they cannot swim."

"Then you admit he is something else besides?"

The one-sided smile came slowly again.

"In China there is always something else besides," he said.

I wondered why the man was so evasive, and resolved to unburden myself at once of the thing I had felt when the eyes of Kung Wo Tai had awakened the troubling question in the back of my mind.

"The man impressed me," I went on hurriedly. "He has magnetism—I felt that. And he has power over men—I saw that. His magnetism and his power are held under strong control—the chains his own will imposes upon them—all that I sensed.

"To him, even more than to the Peking representative, was every Chinese at the banquet deferential; almost obsequious; reverent. He was called away, early, by a

word whispered in his ear. When he left every Chinese there, including the Manchu, arose and bowed. He is more than the power behind the Chino-Asiatique. I am curious; and I'll admit I'd like to know."

The consul shook his head.

"The seeker after knowledge discovers the evil as often as the good," he quoted. Then he shrugged his shoulders again, and the whimsical smile vanished. "I agree with you. Beneath the surface the man is something else. It may be good; but I believe it evil. We have tried to find out—some time the thing may reach out for us. But there are things our agents cannot do. I am sorry I cannot enlighten you, my friend. I felt the man even as did you. But I simply do not know."

I tried to let the question drop.

Yet, in the days that followed, I still carried the picture of the man as he had carefully deposited his ash in the silver tray before him, as he had made his simple speech of welcome, as he had bowed and prayed forgiveness for his early departure from our group.

The tall lean frame of him, the clear-cut, high-bred features from the broad nobility of his forehead to the squareness of his almost British jaw, still impressed me. Haunted, too, I was by the slightly ironic smile and the peculiar greenish depths of the eyes that seemed all pupil.

Strange, too—and it just struck me—that he, of all the Chinese at the banquet, had coiled at the back of his head a cue. He was not, then, a Manchu. And yet, I wondered, was he the type of man who would flaunt so visible a sign of subservience to the Manchu emperors? Clearly he was Chinese—yet the Manchu from Peking had been among the first to stand as he left the room. What did that mean? The thing intrigued me—but as far as active pursuit of the mystery was concerned, I let it drop.

We were busy on the ship. Orders had come for us to sail independently for Vladivostok. We knew not how long we were to sojourn in that City of the Eastern Dawn—a day, a week, three months, or throughout the entire winter. Supplies must be taken aboard for emergency conditions

there. Duty kept my thought in straight lines. Kung Wc Tai fell into the past. But not, as I was to learn, from memory; nor from life.

My Chinese room boy came into my room that evening with his arms full of personal sea stores he had purchased for me from the flagship's canteen. He deposited these on my bunk, then began to putter about the little quarters with obvious purpose behind his yellow mask.

"Speak up," I snapped. "I'm busy."

He sidled to my elbow.

"I go flagship in sampan. Othah China boy in sampan undah blanket. He say he like go Vlad's'ok. He good work boy, I t'ink."

"We don't need any other boys! The ship's full of 'em now. Leave those stores on the bunk, and skip out of here."

In a very short time he was back at my elbow again.

"China boy got plenty trouble, I t'ink. He go way f'om ship when catch Vlad's'ok."

"Get out of here," I growled.

Fifteen minutes he was back once more. I looked up in some asperity, then gasped. Another Chinese was standing at his side. He was nothing more than a boy, but the sorrow on his face was that of all the bedeviled lower levels of Chinadom.

"Much trouble," breathed Sing.

I stared in shocked surprise and horror at the lad. He was indeed in trouble. His faded blue shirt was open, his body exposed. And on his breast was the branded scar of an ancestral tomb; to the right and left and below it, Chinese characters. He was indeed in deep trouble—for the in-burned mark was the sign and symbol of the Society of Ancestral Loss.

No wonder his face was limned with pain and sorrow, no wonder the hope was gone from his lackluster eyes. He had sold his soul and his rights to those of his ancestors to the dread society, and on the ninth day after the fiery iron had deep-bitten into his flesh his life was forfeit to the society's knife.

I sat and stared, with the prickles running over my suddenly tight-tensed skin. No wonder Sing had come and come again.

"He blood blothah," Sing breathed, as his keen eyes noted my change of attitude. "Leave ship in Vlad's'ok. Sir, can please do?"

Slowly I shook my head.

The words of Lieutenant Buckley came back to me.

"They told us in Hankow that once you hear of the Society of Ancestral Loss, you hear and hear again."

He had told us what he knew. And not many months later came our experience with Tuck Cheong and the Sea of Ancestral Fire. Now—was it to happen again?

Too often, too often—and who could tell but that the society would levy horrid retribution upon us? This unfortunate lad here—he had known what he was doing. He must fully have realized the penalty. Deeply I pitied him; for his need of money must have been terrible indeed that he must needs damn his hope for eternity by the sale of his soul.

Soulless, ancestorless, hopeless of past, present or future—condemned to die as a dog would die, and without even a dog's hope! God! The horror of it to a believing Chinese! But—were it well to risk our men, our ship, to save this bit of Chinese clay?

Slowly I shook my head.

Then, to ease my own conscience, I went to the wardroom mess treasurer. Together we knocked at the captain's cabin, entered, and informed the captain of what I knew. But he, also, slowly shook his head.

"I'm sorry for the lad," he said. "As a human being I am proud of him as a man who has made what must have been an awful sacrifice. But as trustee of our men and ship, I cannot sanction his remaining on board. We allowed it once—Tuck Cheong found new life in the waters of the ower Yangste. This lad—no—no. We dare not risk the society's anger. The lad is Chinese, and knows his people. But with the undercurrents of that people we cannot deliberately interfere.

"Our duty is to protect our own people. And that protection we cannot risk. Suppose the society demanded a white life for the yellow one we would save! You see? I am sorry. I may regret doing this. But

put the boy in a sampan, and let him leave the ship. Warn the watch to keep him off."

The boy left the ship in the same pathetic and resigned silence. My heart went out to him as he dropped in a heap on the sampan's tiny deck—his hands close clenched upon his breast as he held the edges of his tattered blue jacket together in an effort to cover the brand that marked his hopeless plight.

Then with a sigh I returned to my duties. We were here, as the captain had said, to care for our countrymen. A thousand unfortunate natives had tasted the society's knife long ere most of us were born. And who were we to deviate from their purpose the gods of Chinese fate?

After all, were we not simply suffered in this teeming land—and suffered only so long as we rode upon its placid seeming surface? Thousands of our countrymen dwelt far in the interior, lonely islands on a vast yellow sea. Was it well to disturb that sea?

The lad was gone. And it was best that he should go.

But what a destiny for him the gods had writ! And yet, thought I, the world is large and all manner and degrees of men must live as best they may upon it. Here was an example of the lowest, and—for the first time in two days there flashed upon the screen of my memory a picture I had tried to forget—and back there in the banquet room I had shaken the long, cool hand, and my eyes had fallen before the power of the green-black pupils, of one of the highest—the power behind the Chino-Asiatique Banking Corporation—Kung Wo Tai. For some reason I shuddered. *That* man had power.

We were the port side outboard ship of a group of three destroyers of our division moored bow and stern in the Whampoa. At four fifty the officer of the deck, myself, reported to the captain that the main engines had been turned over—five minutes later, that the lines which secured us to the center ship, whose anchor chain was linked through the ring of the buoy, had been singled up.

And when, at the stroke of two bells,

we let go everything aft, the devils beneath the flowing tide, helpful in their present caprice, seized upon our stern and threw it out. We backed down, cleared, swung about, and headed through clamorous traffic for Woosung.

At a little after six we crossed the bar, and shortly dropped anchor in the mighty Yangtze, where we were to stay out the night that we might proceed to open sea through the upper channel with the light of morning.

Against the saffron evening sky was the clear-cut forest of masts in Woosung's small craft harborage. And sweeping upstream were the countless sails, yellow tinged in the glow of the dying sun, of the fishing junks and sampans of the Yangtze Horde. Ten, hundreds, thousands, widespread as far as the eye could reach in the great sweep of the river—slowly, surely, watchfully, in majestic multitude, the square-sailed craft slid upon us, enveloped us, passed us by.

"What a fleet it is!" the navigator exclaimed at my side, as he took anchorage bearing upon the Shon Hei Cigarette sign silhouetted to the left of Woosung. Then he added: "And what a power it might be indeed!"

I nodded absently and went below. I was thinking of the Chinese boy we had left in Shanghai—and of his impending doom. Conscience droned upon me still. We had not acted as human beings. We should have hidden him on the ship—and taken the white man's chance.

It was decided that we stand watches that night as though under way at sea. And that gave me the mid—from twelve to four of the morning—a lonely enough tour, with the silent and motionless ship beneath me, and the chill of a misted river about.

Then at nine o'clock came news. The officer of the deck, Lieutenant Weldorf, entered. With him was the chief gunner's mate, acting master at arms for the ship. Their faces were grave.

"Captain," exclaimed Weldorf, a bit excitedly, I fancied, "we've a stowaway on board!"

That startled me. The skipper looked up

from his cards calmly enough, but his words were frigid.

"Wasn't the ship searched before we shoved off this afternoon? Who had the deck?"

I looked up in concern.

"I did, sir. The ship was searched."

The chief nodded vigorously.

But the captain was not through.

"But a man has been found, Phillips. By Heaven, sir—"

Weldorf interrupted softly.

"The man was found just now by one of the cooks, captain. No one would think to look for any one where he hid. He had crawled in with that extra lot of ice we had under canvas in the passage between the port bulwarks and the radio shack. He's half frozen, captain."

The old man's face changed.

"Humph!" He glanced at his cards.

"Put him on the beach then."

The officer of the deck made no move.

"Captain," he whispered in a very hoarse voice, "it's that Chinese lad we put off the ship this—"

The skipper dropped his cards, and half arose.

"You mean—the one with that brand on his—"

Weldorf nodded. We exchanged glances. There was a short silence, during which the skipper tapped at the green baize of the wardroom table.

The officer of the deck ventured a word that sounded well, I think, in the ears of all.

"We—we've no boats in the water, captain. It's pretty dark outside, but—I'll try to hail a—"

The skipper picked up his cards again, and shuffled the five of them in his hand, frowning slightly.

"No. The thing's decided for us." There was relief in his voice, I would have sworn. "And the motor sailor engine won't allow us to risk the boat in this current at night. It's decided. He wanted to go to Vladivostok. We'll shove him off the ship then. Did anybody open the pot?"

The captain was human. A sigh of relief went up from us all.

Weldorf's face cleared.

"I'll see that he's put below decks, sir,"

he said, and he left the wardroom with the chief.

The game broke up shortly before midnight, and I bundled into my sheepskin and climbed topside to relieve the deck.

Weldorf answered my questioning nod quickly.

"We saw that the lad got a hot bath," he said. "He was mighty near frozen. And he's stowed away in the forward quarters now, in a spare bunk near Sing's. I'm kind of glad he—ah—got away."

"Ditto!" I whispered.

Weldorf lingered to finish his cigarette.

"Pretty black night if a man tried to make the beach," he rambled on. "Not a star in sight." He flicked his ash over the side. "Can hardly see the water."

I peered out with him. Our head was upstream now, and we could hear the gurgling of the unseen river about our chain and narrow bows. A chill breeze whipped in our faces and blew our cigarettes aglow. The condensed moisture set my eyes a winking.

I turned with a half chuckle, for somehow my spirits had risen.

"On such a night—" I started to quote.

"Hah!" returned Weldorf. "Not for love—not this night. Better begin with Hamlet: 'Now 'tis the witching hour of the night when churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes forth conta—'"

I shivered elaborately.

"You've smoked enough," I cried. "As officer of the deck I order you below and to your bunk. Sweet dreams."

"May the river devils spare you," Weldorf grinned, tossed his half-consumed smoke over the side, and disappeared.

I took my usual turn about the bridge to see that all were well; then climbed down to the main deck and rapidly made my way to the fantail. All was clear. All lights were burning brightly. There was silence below, only warm air and chorused breathing came to me as I peered down the hatchways of the after and forward quarters of the vessel.

On the foc's'le, blinking in the dew-laden breeze, I kicked the chain between wild-

cat and chock. Shielding my eyes from the bow light I could barely make out the stiff arc of the chain to where it vanished in a small swirl of black that must be water. The swift river muttered under me as I leaned over the life lines. All was well here, too.

I returned to my usual post in the starboard wing of the bridge, lit another cigarette, and leaned my chin on my crossed elbows on the sill of the open port. And, as usual, lulled by the tranquillity of the night, and the whisperings of the Yangtze I began to dream.

To dream of home, of letters I had received—and not received. Of China—the things I had bought in Shanghai, the pleasure they would give my family at home. Of the Russian City of the Eastern Dawn far to the north—I wondered what it would be like. I wondered how long we would stay.

Perhaps there, too, one could acquire curious treasures—brass samovars, for instance, that some ancient, revolution-ruined house no longer could use. I had heard much of Vladivostok—our cruisers alternated there throughout the year to see that certain promises—made by none-too-trustworthy an ally—were kept; and that the people might live in some security and peace.

Security! Peace!

What more natural than that my mind should flash to the Chinese lad hidden under blankets below?

Was he secure, I wondered?

Was it really, for him, an escape? Would not that dread society, to which he had forfeited his soul and his life, send the knife to follow him to that city in the north? It was implacable, that awful league of souls and blood—and its record knew no failure. Relentlessly its calm mind would follow the boy. Inexorably the payment would be exacted. The few days of security on this ship would be but brief respite for him. His doom was written, his soul already beyond the bounds of hope, his life—was not *his* life.

Surely, with the certainty of the inevitable hand of death, the agent of the Society of Ancestral Loss would seek him out.

And sooner or later the keen thrust would pierce his heart.

But for these few days—what harm could come?

My conscience had smitten me when I put him off the ship in Shanghai. My heart had bounded with gladness when the officer of the deck had brought the news of his stowaway and the captain had shown himself a man. Sing had fixed that, I had no doubt. Yet I would never punish Sing.

A movement came at my side. One of the lookouts.

"A sampan almost brushed our side, sir," he whispered.

"I noticed it," I returned. And I had—although the flitting shadow of the thing had made little impression on my consciousness.

I peered out into the misty blackness of the river.

"There's another one drifting down on us, sir." The lad's arm stretched out to port.

"They can see our lights," I answered. "Their boats cost 'em too much to risk bumping an iron ship." I paused a moment, then nodded to starboard. "There's another over there."

The lad rubbed the moisture from his eyes. I was glad of the opportunity of talking a bit.

"The river's alive with 'em in the day-time, sir, ain't it?" the boy ran on. "Millions of 'em. I didn't think they was people enough in China to man 'em."

"We don't know China," I replied, musingly. "There's a couple more."

What a lonely little island we were in the far blackness of the night. I drew my sheepskin closer, and shuddered slightly. We did not know China. Its mystery forever overhung. Our little ship—alone.

I pointed to two ghostly black sails almost dead ahead. Even as I pointed, another broke from the gloom. Then another and another—and others still, appearing like dismal phantoms upon a gloomy screen, silently sweeping down upon us with the power of wind and stream to urge them on.

And for a moment I wondered if they saw us.

I was about to order the lookout to give a few taps at the ship's bell to warn them, when the line of them parted to starboard and to port. In the open space between came other tall sailed ghosts. These, also, parted. Then almost before we could sense it, the river before us was a mass of sails, and a chorus of creaking rudder oars and the faint odor of fish fetched to us on the breeze.

To the right and left the mass parted—only to discover the apparition of still others upstream, all slowly, silently, almost awfully, sweeping down upon our ship.

Then suddenly my heart gave a quick throb. The ship was entirely surrounded by these phantom craft. We could make out the misted forms of the Chinese crews. Came a bump somewhere on the ship's side.

And then, before my unbelieving eyes, the lines of sampans and junks closed in upon us, and even as my hand leaped to the general alarm the decks were alive with half-clad and silent natives—silent, but actively leaping in scattering groups—as though bent upon a purpose preconceived.

More junks closed in to make a second line. Scores more of silent figures leaped from high bow and poop to a place upon our decks. The lad at my side gave a sudden yell—and the horrid screeching wail of the siren brought me to full comprehension that this was not, an outlandish nightmare, but an unheard-of and terrible reality.

By Heaven! My hair prickled—what helpless fools we were! In China—trusted China. Captured! An American destroyer!

I leaped for the ladder, a heavy long-glass in my hand.

But before I could swing upon the half-naked native climbing to the bridge, I heard a shout behind; then my arms were seized, and struggle as I would I shortly lay well-nigh unable to wriggle hand or foot, a prisoner on my own ship!

Muffled sounds from below echoed with the hideous, shrill, prolonged sound of the general alarm.

Good God! An American destroyer! Captured!

And I—I, had seen the first ghostly spy

that had almost touched our side, had beheld the opening of the attack, and never realized, never dreamed that it could be!

Like a bound bundle of rags I lay on my own bridge—the bumping of a veritable armada of junks upon our iron sides, the tall forest of their awkward swaying masts above the bulwarks, the feet of their multitude crews dully pounding on our decks—every one of us, I had no doubt or hope, to have a knife in his throat before the clock ticked thirty seconds more.

I gave a deep-throated curse.

It was answered by a voice I vaguely recognized. I wondered which of the look-outs had been spared thus far with me. And why?

Then I caught the words:

“Be silent, my friend. But a minute more and this will all be done.”

I strove to turn my head to see the speaker. I cursed whoever it might be. There came no reply. My body prickled again. Done! Yes, well enough done! And we done, finished, dead, with it!

Another mystery of the China coast. I growled another curse. My friends even now were sweltering their warm blood below. Our men—good God—caught in their sleep! And we had trusted—trusted—the thought jerked to me.

Something—something we had done had cut beneath the placid currents of Chinese life. Something. What?

Then, filling me with even greater horror, came a long-drawn, piercing scream.

Following this a native leaped up the ladder to the bridge. He kowtowed obsequiously to whoever was behind me, and in a low voice spoke a few quick words in the tongue of his people. He was answered by a swift sentence, and left, shouting as he jumped from the ladder.

A tramping of bare feet pounded in my ear, and I sensed that a great weight had lifted from our decks. I strained to twist my head higher, and gasped—for the forest of masts was swaying, and bobbing, and slipping by. And then came a series of bumps against our side, some long, thinly rasping, scraping sounds, a more and more distant murmur of lapping oars and whispering rigging.

As from a dream, the massed fleets of the Yangste Horde had slid phantomlike into the oblivion of night.

Then a tall man stepped from behind my head, stooped, and severed my bonds with a quick, sure hand.

I struggled to my feet. The man was masked. Quickly I leaped for the long-glass which yet lay where it had fallen upon the cocoa matting.

“Stop!”

This command came in clear-cut English.

I whirled about, half crouched, the weapon I would use not a finger length away.

Then slowly I stiffened erect, and folded my arms, awaiting the death I felt sure would come, even as it must have to my comrade below. For the man gripped a wide-mouthed automatic close to his side, and one hand was slowly reaching for the corner of his mask. He would show me his face, I thought, and then—fire would leap from the gun, and I would know no more.

In fascination I stared at the hand that slowly raised. How long and slimly delicate it was! I—I had seen such a hand—had grasped such a— Those hidden eyes—the power—the power that reached out—made itself felt—

And then the man spoke again. And this time I knew whose voice it was.

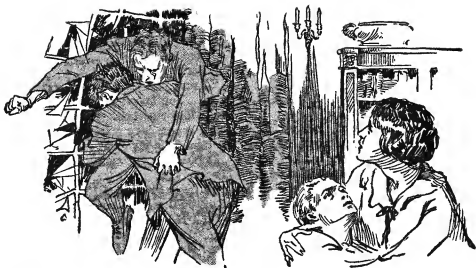
“Were it not known that this ship itself were not at fault, my friend, the river god would be feasting on it and every man of its crew even now. For that much may you thank the gods of wisdom and of foresight and of chance. The thing is done; our mission accomplished. And you and I, my friend, have met before. Look—then seal your lips.”

With a lightning movement he lifted the mask; then turned quickly—and vanished from my sight.

We sailed safely in the morning for Vladivostok, not a white man of us harmed, nor his goods.

But the Chinese boy with the brand of the Society of Ancestral Loss upon his breast was gone, and with him my room boy, Sing.





# The Sign of the Serpent

By JOHN GOODWIN

Author of "Paid in Full," "Without Mercy," and others.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE SACRIFICE.

STEPHEN MARNEY stumbled in through the open door; disheveled, exhausted, laboring for breath. He stopped short and looked round him, dazedly.

"My God!" he gasped. "Betty—"

Richard lay like a log on the floor, inert and senseless, his face deathly white. Beside him kneeled Beatrice; she had raised his head, her arms were about his neck, she was kissing him and crying wildly.

"Dickie, darling—speak to me! Dickie!"

The sight paralyzed Stephen for a moment; he hurried to her side.

"He isn't dead?" she cried brokenly. "Stephen—tell me—he isn't dead?"

The front of Richard's jacket was wet with blood. Stephen opened vest and shirt with swift fingers.

"What happened, Betty?" he said hoarsely.

Beatrice seemed incapable of answering. Six inches below the coiled snake tattooed about Richard's neck, Stephen found the bullet wound, clean drilled, high on the right breast.

"He won't die of that!" said Stephen with as much confidence as he could muster. "Give me your scarf!" He snatched it from his sister's neck, and, with a folded handkerchief beneath it, contrived a rough but not unskillful bandage, knotting the scarf over Richard's shoulder.

"Raise him, keep his head well up—that's it," said Stephen quickly. He rose to his feet. Richard's eyelids fluttered faintly.

A frightened man-servant came hurrying into the room, pale and breathless.

"What on earth's happened here?" he cried. "The master's dead! The—"

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 26.*

He stopped abruptly, gazing open-mouthed and horror-stricken at the prostrate Richard.

"Get a doctor—don't stand gaping there!" said Beatrice fiercely. "A doctor, quick!"

"Bring him back with you," said Stephen, "and warn the police!"

The man-servant gasped, and vanished. Stephen, still half dazed himself, saw the revolver lying on the floor, and kicked it aside. He glanced toward the window, the snapped wooden upright between the open casements brought a gleam of intelligence to him; he hurried to the window and looked down.

The sight that met him held Stephen spellbound for a moment. Then he shivered, and, glancing back at his sister, drew the curtain across the window. Beatrice was oblivious to anything but Richard.

"Stephen," she said, "he's coming round! He's—"

Richard's eyes were open. He looked up blindly. Beatrice's face, wet with tears, was close above his own. She held his head against her breast.

"Betty," he said feebly, and then with an effort: "It didn't hit you—didn't get you—"

"No," she said huskily. "Lie quiet, Dickie."

"That's all right," murmured Richard, with a deep sigh. His eyes closed again. Then, after a moment's pause: "Stephen! 'S you, isn't it?"

"Yes. Don't talk, old chap."

"Don't—be a fool," murmured Richard. His eyes opened again and roved round the room. "Where's Piers?"

"Dead!"

"Ah! Sure of that?"

"Just you rest quiet, old son," said Stephen gently. "You're hurt a bit, but we're looking after you. Nothing serious; soon be all right. Doctor's coming along."

Richard paid no attention to him. His eyes were looking dreamily up into Beatrice's face. He appeared to reflect.

"Stephen! Did you say—something about police?"

"They're on the way."

"When they come," murmured Richard,

"don't tell 'em any more—than they ask you. Not yet—anyway. Got that?"

Neither of the others spoke.

"Stephen!"

"Yes?"

"I want you—telephone at once. Whitehouse. You know—lawyer man—Colchester. Most important. Tell him what's happened—come here quick as he can. Man we want. Go an' do it."

Stephen did not move. Richard opened his eyes wide.

"If you don't do it," he said with an effort, "I'll get up—try telephone myself!"

"All right, Dickie," said Stephen hastily. "I will, the minute the doctor's seen you. Honest."

Richard seemed content.

"So Piers is dead," he said drowsily, "and—here am I. It seems queer. When a man's—got to die—"

"You're not going to die!" said Stephen.

"I didn't mean me. Of course, I'm not going to die! If your doctor told me I'd got to, I wouldn't," said Richard sleepily. "Know why?"

The ghost of a smile flickered on his lips.

"My damned obstinacy," he whispered. "I'm a Marney!"

His eyelids drooped, and he relapsed into unconsciousness. But there was a new serenity in the silent face.

"He'll do," said Stephen. "Dickie's safe."

Beatrice gave a deep sigh. She swayed gently; Stephen slipped a swift, supporting arm around her.

For the first time in her life Beatrice had fainted.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### STEPHEN UNDER ARREST.

POLICE SERGEANT LEUCHARS and Constable Ferne, of the Essex Constabulary, arriving promptly on bicycles, found a group of awe-stricken men-servants standing beside two bodies that lay on the flagstones by the porch.

The sergeant's first question was met by a volley of confused replies from the bystanders; he glanced up at the window overhead,

and stooped quickly over the prostrate form of Piers Marney.

"Go up to that room, Ferne—see who's there. Touch nothing till I come up," said the sergeant briefly. "Anybody here see the thing happen?"

"I was cuttin' the yew hedge," said an agitated gardener, "when I see this big chap here come runnin' up the drive like a lunatic an' go right into the house. There was a young feller came runnin' after him. I was wholly stemmed, I was, fared like I could only stand starin'. Then I drops me shears an' goes over to the house—fore I got there something went smash at that window, up there, an' the big chap an' Sir Piers comes a-hurtlin' out of it together, an' fell down on the stones here right ag'in' me."

The gardener gulped and shivered.

"An awful sight it was. The big un did it. Got his arms right around the governor he had—an' fair chucked himself out, an' Sir Piers with him."

He passed his forearm across his eyes shakily.

"I know that man," he added; "he's the chap they call Mad Matt, as lived in a hut down by the creeks. He's one o' them mushmen Sir Piers was turnin' off their holdin's."

The sergeant, busy with his task, nodded briefly. He had some acquaintance with Matthew. Horrified though they were, there seemed little pity among the men for Piers. A two-seater car came whirring up the drive and stopped; an amazed doctor sprang out. The sergeant told him in a few words what had happened, and he stooped beside the bodies. His examination of Matt was very brief. Over the other he took more time.

By the doctor's orders a shutter was taken off its hinges and brought forward quickly. Piers Marney was lifted onto it.

"He's livin' yet!" exclaimed the gardener under his breath.

"Carry him in gently; lay the shutter on a bed, and don't move him," said the doctor. He turned to the sergeant. "Sir Piers Marney is living, but he is beyond my aid. He may possibly recover consciousness, but he cannot live twenty-four hours. The other is dead."

"I've always said that crazy fellow oughtn't to be allowed loose," said the sergeant gloomily, "though he never did any harm to any one till now—seemed quiet enough. Case is quite clear, sir—"

"Is that doctor never coming!" cried Stephen, emerging suddenly from the doorway, and taking no notice whatever of the group of men lifting the shutter. "Are you he, sir? I want you upstairs quick—man dangerously wounded."

"Wounded?" exclaimed the doctor. "Lead the way. Where is he? I can do nothing for these others."

"What's this?" said the sergeant. "Who's wounded? Here—"

Stephen turned to him.

"This is a matter of life and death," he said. "I'm at your service as soon as the doctor's seen him."

The sergeant followed Stephen and the doctor hastily up the stairs, meeting the constable coming down.

"Bloodstain on the floor in that front room—revolver on floor, one barrel discharged," he said quickly to the sergeant, "nobody there. What—"

The sergeant stopped him, sent him downstairs with some brief instructions, and hurried after Stephen, who opened the door of a bedroom on the landing. On the bed lay Richard, white and unconscious.

"Who shot him?" said the sergeant. "Were you here when this happened?"

Stephen shook his head. The doctor was already examining Richard. His verdict was soon given.

"He will recover," said the doctor. "He has missed death by a couple of inches, no more." He opened the bag he had brought up with him, and poured water into the basin. "Who brought him in here?"

"I carried him in."

The sergeant laid a hand on Stephen's shoulder.

"I'll trouble you to come out with me. The doctor's got his job."

But Stephen turned back.

"Doctor," he said, "when you've done what you can for him, will you go as quick as you're able an' look after my sister. She's in the bedroom opposite, across the landing. She'll need you, too."

"Your sister?" said the doctor, looking up from his task.

"Beatrice Marney. She's fainted. I took her in there—away out of it all. I brought you here first—because he's wounded, you see—but she's got trouble enough, too. If I'm to go with this policeman, will you do that an' do it quick?"

The doctor looked staggered. But he was physician first, and man afterward.

"I will see to it."

Stephen found himself out on the landing. The door closed behind him.

"Hold up!" said the sergeant, catching him by the arm. Stephen had swayed suddenly, like a drunken man. His legs nearly gave way under him.

"All right," he said faintly. "Yes, I'm a bit done; but I'm ready for you."

The sergeant looked into his face, and led him firmly but not ungently through the open door into the front room, and took him to a chair.

"Sit there," he said, and, closing the door, the sergeant took a survey of the apartment, the damaged window and carpet, picked up the revolver, opened the breech and glanced at it.

"Whose pistol is this?" he said curtly.

"I guess it's Piers Marney's. I've seen it before."

"Did you see that man shot?"

"No."

"Were you here when Sir Piers was attacked?"

"No. I came in just after it happened."

"You know the man that's shot? Who is he?"

"Richard Maxon—my greatest friend."

Stephen was recovering himself. And with redoubled emphasis Richard's warning came back to him—to say nothing more than was necessary until he knew where he stood. For he was quite in the dark as to what Beatrice's share in the tragedy was. She had told him nothing.

"What was he doing here, and who shot him?"

"I can't answer for Maxon. The first thing I saw when I came in, he was lying on the floor wounded. I supposed Piers Marney shot him."

"Give an account of yourself," said the sergeant sharply; "and I warn you to be careful. How came you here, and what was your business at the house?"

"I'll tell you exactly what I did see, and at present I don't know much more than you do. How I came across the madman from the marshes is a long story, and I suppose you don't want it now. What I did know was that he meant coming here to do Piers Marney a mischief, for he told me so plain enough—the man was raving. I followed to prevent him. And I was too late. He got to the house first—I suppose he saw Piers in this room from below, or heard his voice, and came right up. When I got here there was nobody in the room but Maxon and my sister. When we'd done what we could for Maxon—"

"Your sister! What do you mean?"

"I'm Stephen Marney—Sir Neville's son," said Stephen quietly, "and nephew to Piers. Got that?"

"Either you are as mad as the man you came here with, or else you're lying very stupidly," said the sergeant sternly. "Do you take me for a fool?"

"Not any. With the exception of the doctor, you're the first intelligent man I've met to-day," said Stephen. "I'm givin' you the cold truth, but just at the moment I suppose it don't matter much who I am. To get on with it—there was a flunky had been in; I sent him for the doctor and the police. I cleared Maxon an' my sister out of this room, having no one to help me; for both of them had got all they could stand—I couldn't leave 'em lying about the floor. Then I spent three minutes ringin' up Lawyer Whitehouse on the phone, and told him to come right along here, Piers Marney bein' dead."

"Mr. Whitehouse, of Colchester?" exclaimed the sergeant.

"Yes. He said he'd burn the ground, an' if his car can move I should say he'll be here in about twenty minutes. I think you're wastin' time over me; but, of course, I'm in your hands."

The sergeant stared at him dumbly. What he would have said is uncertain, for at that moment the doctor opened the door.

"How is she?" said Stephen, like a flash.

"Miss Marney? She is suffering from shock. There is nothing to be feared now—she must be kept quiet for a while," said the doctor. "Sergeant, I have just seen Sir Piers. He is now fully conscious; he asked me if the police were here, and I think he wants to make a statement. If you are to hear it, you had better come at once."

The news relieved the sergeant immensely. He hurried downstairs, taking Stephen with him. In the hall they found the constable.

"Ferne, take charge of this man; keep him here till I come out," said the sergeant.

"Am I arrested?" asked Stephen.

"Yes," replied the sergeant, and followed the doctor into a room to the right of the hall. It was a large apartment that had been used in the past as a ground-floor bedroom. On the bed lay what remained of Piers Marney.

## CHAPTER L.

### REPARATIONS.

PIERS'S face was as the face of a dead man, save only for the eyes, which were bright, clear, and almost uncannily alive. They followed the movements of the two men who so quietly entered the room. The doctor seated himself beside the bed.

"Are you in charge here, sergeant?" said Piers in a clear, thin voice. His lips scarcely moved.

"Yes, sir."

"I have a statement to make to you. Doctor!"

"Yes?"

"What is my chance of recovery? Have I any at all?"

The doctor did not answer.

Piers read the reply in his eyes.

"Thank you, doctor," said Piers quietly.

"I am infinitely obliged to you. I see that I have none."

The sergeant, looking very troubled, moved nearer to the bed.

"That is better," said Piers. "Sit near

me, both of you. I have time, I suppose, for the little that needs to be done. It is, of course, impossible to move me." He paused. "What has become of that man who attacked me?"

"He is dead, Sir Piers."

Piers's eyelids drooped slightly. He seemed about to speak again, when a voice became audible outside in the hall, and again the eyes opened.

"Who is that I hear speaking?" he asked.

"A man I found on the premises, sir," said the sergeant, "who calls himself Stephen Marney."

Another pause.

"Bring him in here," said Piers.

The sergeant hesitated, but the doctor, with a glance at his patient, rose and opened the door.

A few moments later Stephen stood at the foot of the bed, and saw that the shadow of death lay over the man who lay there.

They looked at each other in silence.

"Where is my niece Beatrice?" asked Piers.

The doctor explained quietly.

"I understand," said the level, toneless voice. "My brain is perfectly clear. She is not injured, then? Where did you find her, sergeant?"

"I have not seen her yet, Sir Piers. She is in the doctor's hands."

Piers made no reply. For quite a minute or more there was dead silence. The sergeant seemed about to break it, but the doctor made him a warning sign. They waited for Piers to speak.

"You have not seen her?" he said at last. And then: "Richard Maxon— He was in the room with me when I was attacked by that madman. What has become of Maxon?"

"He is lying unconscious with a bullet wound in his chest," said the sergeant, "but the doctor says he will recover. It's impossible for me to question him. It is to you I am looking for information, Sir Piers."

There was a third and longer pause. The eyes of the dying man, shining from the immobile face, were extraordinarily intelligent and alert.

"Take down my statement, sergeant," he said.

"This man who stands before me is my nephew, Stephen Marney, and the son of my late brother Neville. I acknowledge him as the heir at law to the Marney title and estates."

Stephen, his eyes on the dying man's face, remained silent. The doctor gazed blankly around. The sergeant took down the statement in his notebook.

"Have you got that?"

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant stolidly.

"He came to me a short time ago, and made this claim. I thought him an impostor. Since then, however, proofs have been forthcoming, and I find he is, without any possible doubt, my brother's son. His claim is perfectly genuine, and all the evidence is available. It will be placed in the hands of those whom it concerns."

The sergeant completed the entry.

"I give this the first place," said Piers quietly, "because it is of chief importance, and concerns the living, whereas I shall soon be dead. What you wish to know, however, is the manner in which I received this fatal injury. Stephen Marney had no part in it whatever.

"My niece, Beatrice, and I, in company with Richard Maxon, were discussing intimate family affairs in the privacy of my upper library—the matter of Stephen Marney's claim. He was not present. It was then that this marshman burst into the room without warning and attacked me. I believe him to be insane; he considered himself to have some grudge against me, and I know that he has more than once made threats against me.

"I have lived abroad, and it is my habit to carry a pistol. One is entitled to defend one's self. But the man's attack was so sudden and furious that he overpowered me before I could use it against him. I only know that I fired the pistol. With what effect I cannot say—and I knew nothing more till I found myself in this room. That, sergeant, is all I am able to tell you."

The sergeant laid down his pencil and produced the pistol.

"Is this yours, Sir Piers?"

"Yes, that is mine."

"One cartridge has been discharged from the magazine, sir. It was certainly that which struck Richard Maxon."

"Then it was my hand that shot him. You understand? There is no doubt that Maxon owes his wound to me. It was an accident—a pure accident—that he was shot."

"Let me get this quite clear, sir," said the sergeant. "Being attacked by the marshman, you tried to defend yourself with this pistol. There was a struggle. All you know is that the pistol was fired. The bullet struck Maxon."

"You have put it very clearly, sergeant."

"Pure accident," repeated the sergeant as he wrote. "You had—I've got to set down the fact, sir—no intention whatever of shooting Maxon?"

"Neither reason nor intention, then or at any time," said Piers quietly. "There was nothing I desired less than Maxon's death."

He turned his eyes slowly upon Stephen, who met his gaze in silence. The ghost of a smile seemed to flicker on Piers's lips.

"We are Marneys—all of us," he said. "I have nothing to add, sergeant, but this—"

There was a faint knock, and the door opened; the constable's face appeared.

"Sergeant, Mr. Whitehouse is here. He is very anxious to see Sir Piers. I thought I'd best—"

"Whitehouse?" murmured Piers. "Lawyer Whitehouse? Admit him at once."

Broken, dying, Piers's personality yet seemed to dominate the others. The lawyer entered. Imperturbable as he was, the sight that met him gave Mr. Whitehouse a visible shock.

"I do not know what brings you here, Whitehouse," said Piers. "Were you aware of what has occurred?"

"I was informed by telephone," replied the lawyer gravely. "I came with all possible speed."

"You could not possibly have arrived more opportunely. You are the very man I want. Sergeant, have the goodness to give Mr. Whitehouse that statement of mine which you have written down, and allow him to read it."

The sergeant, after a moment's hesitation, passed his notebook to the solicitor, who seated himself and read the entries carefully. He finished it, and glanced at Stephen thoughtfully, but his face remained perfectly inscrutable.

"Do you understand it?" asked Piers.

"I understand what is written here," replied Whitehouse.

"I have always had a high opinion of your intelligence, Whitehouse. I do not feel equal to further explanations, and I think they are unnecessary. Dr. Cobbold allots me no more than another hour or two of life."

"I hope he may be mistaken," was all the lawyer could find to say.

"Do you, indeed?" replied Piers's voice wearily. "I cannot agree with you, Whitehouse. It is, on the whole, the best news I have received for a very long time. I shall be glad to go. Only one thing of importance remains—that my will should be made before these witnesses here present. That is necessary. Will you take it from my dictation, Whitehouse?"

There was dead silence as Whitehouse, having placed writing materials on the little table by the bedside, seated himself and waited. He was obliged to bend closer to Piers; the voice was growing faint and weak.

"This is the last will and testament of me, Piers Marney, of Walton Knoll and Mersea Holt, in the County of Essex. I bequeath all my property, of whatever description and wherever situate, to"—Piers paused a moment, then continued with an effort—"to Stephen Marney, otherwise known as Daniel Flint, late of San Francisco, and who now stands before me in the presence of the undersigned witnesses. And I appoint him sole executor of this my will.

"I attach no conditions to this bequest, only recording it as my wish that the legatee, if he sees fit, shall make over my estate of Walton Knoll to my niece, Beatrice Marney, by deed of gift, when he shall have come into possession. As witness my hand—"

Piers concluded. He waited till Whitehouse had finished writing.

"Read it out, if you please," he said.

Mr. Whitehouse did so.

"Now tell me—what will be the effect of that will?"

The lawyer scanned it again.

"Its effect will be this," he said. "On your death Stephen Marney, alias Daniel Flint, will legally succeed both to the property which was originally yours, and to such residue and accumulation of income in hand from the Mersea Holt estate as does not go with the entail, whether he proves himself to be Sir Neville's son or not."

"You are sure of that?"

"Beyond question. Should he fail to establish himself as Sir Neville's son, the Mersea Holt estate will fall into Chancery, pending the decision as to who is the heir. But in that case the net personality remains—some forty thousand pounds, I believe—and is yours, to bequeath as you wish. You leave it to him. He will succeed to it—though not of course to the title, unless your niece challenges the will—"

"We need not consider that," said Piers.

"Put the pen in my hand. I will sign if I am able; if not, my mark is sufficient?"

"Certainly."

The will was signed, and attested in silence by the two witnesses. When it was done Piers slowly turned his eyes upon Stephen, and addressed him for the first time.

"I think no one will challenge my statement or my will," said Piers with the ghost of a smile. "Doctor?"

Dr. Cobbold drew nearer.

"If the police have done with me, I shall be glad if all of you will withdraw—except Mr. Whitehouse. I am growing rather weak, and I have some instructions for my solicitor, which are for his ear alone."

The sergeant nodded. Whitehouse was left in the room, alone with the dying man.

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE AGREEMENT.

WHEN they were in the hall together the police sergeant turned to Stephen Marney. His manner was grave and characterized by respect.

"Is there any information you would wish to give me, sir?" he said.

Stephen shook his head.

"Not unless it's necessary. Am I still under arrest?"

"No. You'll understand, though, sir, that I was obliged to do what I did. I had not seen Sir Piers then."

"If you understand anything at all of what happened in that room," replied Stephen, "it's more than I do. I can't put you wise, sergeant."

"All I'm personally concerned about," said the sergeant, "is the encounter between Sir Piers and the marshman, Matthew—and this shooting business. That's the case in hand, it's been made clear enough by Sir Piers; there will, of course, be an inquest. I'm going to telephone for the chief constable. The rest seems to be a family matter for the lawyers to settle. I've got the evidence I want."

"What you say seems quite sound to me," said Stephen quietly. "I shall be here if I'm wanted. If you don't require anything further from me now, I'll leave you."

The sergeant nodded and made for the telephone room. Stephen, only too glad to be alone, entered the large library, and seated himself at a table. He rested his throbbing temples on his hands, and thought.

The thing that had occurred was altogether beyond him.

Presently he took a sheet of paper from the desk and a pencil; having a very accurate memory, Stephen set down, almost word for word, what he had heard Piers say to the sergeant.

Having done this he scanned the statement through carefully; it still puzzled him.

It looked remarkably natural and plausible. But he did not believe a word of it. Stephen himself had not been a witness of these remarkable happenings which Piers had described. He felt there was something wrong about them.

Nor for one moment did he believe in any death-bed repentance on Piers's part. It was too unlike the man. Why, moreover, had Piers acknowledged him as the heir to the Marney inheritance? Why smooth the way for the man he had reason to hate?

Stephen, feeling quite at a loss, thrust the paper into his pocket, and went out. There was nothing to be done. On the stairs he met the doctor.

"I have just come from Mr. Maxon's room," said Cobbold. "He is very much better, and I anticipate no danger. But he keeps asking for you."

"I particularly want to see him," said Stephen eagerly; "can I?"

"I would rather keep him quiet," said the doctor, "still—he seems so troubled about it; you had better go. Don't stay long."

Stephen hurried upstairs. He found Richard comfortably established in bed, very pale, but fully conscious and alert.

"Hullo!" he said. "How's Betty? Look here, do you think you can keep those police from worrying her?"

"They haven't seen her yet."

"Good." The assurance seemed to please Richard immensely. He asked how it was that Piers came by his end; he seemed to have a vague idea that Stephen had killed him. Stephen briefly explained Mad Matt's arrival.

"Do you say that Piers is not dead?" interrupted Richard. "You told me—" An extraordinary bitter light came into his eyes. "Stephen, if I were not lying here crippled, I think I would find him and kill him with my own hands! It is an affront to the human race that such a devil as Piers should be allowed to live!"

"You need not trouble," said Stephen quietly, though Richard's vehemence surprised him, "he will not last the day. I have just come from him. I don't know if I ought to be telling you this now—but here's what Piers has told the police; it's his own version."

He read out the copied statement to Richard, who listened at first with blank amazement, and at the finish for a long time remained silent. At last his lips twisted in a singularly grim smile.

"I agree with every word of it!" he said slowly.

Stephen stared at him.

"Are you sure?" he said. "I wasn't a witness, but, plausible as it is, it seems to me like a lie."

Richard considered.



"No," he said, "it is not a lie. I can take my oath that what you have read me there is the truth."

"Yes? One wouldn't expect a man to die with a lie on his lips. But with Piers—" Richard shook his head.

"You say he is dying," he said more gently, a look almost of admiration came into his eyes. "There is more in Piers than you would think. His—intelligence remains with him to the last."

"Do you mean this acknowledgment of me as his heir? I don't see—"

"No; I don't only mean that."

"But—"

"I agree with that statement he has made to the police," repeated Richard. "And—I hope that Beatrice will agree with it, too."

Stephen was at a loss. Before he could answer the doctor appeared and glanced at Richard.

"I must ask you to leave my patient now," he said to Stephen. Richard nodded.

"Tell Betty what I said," was his last word. Stephen found himself outside.

"I seem to be the only fool in the piece," he said dazedly; "it's got me beat."

He turned, and found his sister standing at his elbow. Beatrice appeared to have recovered, but was looking so worn and distressed that Stephen felt a shock of alarm as he looked at her. She touched him on the arm, and without a word led the way to a small boudoir adjoining her own room. She closed the door, and her first inquiry was for Richard.

"Going strong," said Stephen; "nothing to worry about at all. But Piers," he added, "is not dead, as I thought. They tell me he cannot last long."

The girl's eyes hardened at the mention of Piers's name. She looked as bitter as Richard had done. The news was far from arousing any sympathy in her.

"Tell me," she said.

"Are you sure you're fit to hear any more of this? It seems—"

"Of course I am. Get on with it."

He made her sit on the sofa, put an arm around her, and gave her briefly the same information he had given Richard. She received it very differently. At the end, her eyes were blazing with anger.

"It is false from beginning to end!" she cried. "Who can have believed it?"

Stephen felt as if his head were spinning.

"The police believe it," he replied, "and Dickie says it's true, and that he can swear to it."

Beatrice rose to her feet.

"Dickie says that?" she gasped.

"And he said that you would agree."

Beatrice seemed utterly taken aback. There was a long silence, and at last she spoke.

"Listen," she said, "and I will tell you what did happen."

She described to Stephen all that had passed between Piers, Richard, and herself in the upper room before the tragic arrival of Mad Matt. Beatrice had regained control of herself; she told the story quite simply. It was Stephen who, as he heard it, turned deathly white.

"Of all the fiends that ever existed," he said thickly, "I guess there was never one like Piers."

"You see," said Beatrice simply, "it was me he meant to kill. Unless we gave in to him, and let him have his way. And as Dickie couldn't stop him—he just threw himself between, and took the bullet that was meant for me."

Stephen looked at his sister. There was a moisture in his eyes that prevented his seeing very much of her.

"That," he said with a faint gulp, "is very like Dickie."

Beatrice nodded. She was unable to speak. Suddenly she buried her face in her hands, and began to cry like a small child. Stephen dropped beside her on the sofa and comforted her as well as he was able. Presently the sobs ceased.

"He'll be as well as I am in a month—old Dickie," said Stephen. "The only loser is Piers." He paused. "Why did he tell that tale to the police?"

"Isn't it clear as daylight?" said the girl. "They have not questioned either Dickie or me. Piers knew it. He gives the police his version. It's simple and plain, and they accept it. He intends us to accept it, too."

"He acknowledges you as his nephew, Stephen—he clears the way for you. Mersea Holt is no use to a dead man. Of his

own free will, and before witnesses, he testifies that you are the heir of the Marneys. And that's the price he pays."

"The price for what?"

"For my silence, and Richard's silence, about the—the thing that happened in that room, just before the end. Piers's last wish is that that should be wiped from the record."

"That alone?"

"And as much more as can be kept a secret between us. That is what Piers is fighting for—even on his death-bed."

Stephen's forehead knitted.

"Can you understand it?" he asked.

"Of course I can. I haven't known Piers all my life without understanding him. He fights for his own hand. He hates being beaten. The chief points about Piers are his selfishness and his vanity. He is beaten now. But he would certainly prefer not to go to his grave with the name of being the worst scoundrel of his time—and a failure at that. You see?"

Stephen nodded.

"Suppose," pursued Beatrice, "that the doctor was wrong, and he survived? If the whole truth were told, he would spend the rest of his life in jail. So, having a weapon left him, he bargains for silence. And it's cleverly done."

"Is that why Dickie agrees?"

She shook her head.

"Dickie's thinking of me. When all this comes out I shall be in rather a dreadful position. I've stood a good deal already, Stephen. But it means the witness box for me. To go over all that horror again; to tell the court how Piers threatened to kill me, and why—all that was said and done in that room. A case that will fill every newspaper in England. Piers is counting on that. I could face it—I'm not afraid. But it's the most dreadful thing yet."

"It's appalling!" said Stephen. "And—what good would it all do—now?"

"None. But I'm not going to lie. And Dickie knows it. I don't understand him. Give me that paper of yours again."

She scanned it through, and gave it back to him.

"What do you make of it—now?" she asked.

"There is nothing in it that is not cold truth. Dickie is right. Piers admits shooting him—by accident," said Stephen grimly. "But what he meant to do—"

"Leave that out," said Beatrice. "You say that Piers is—dying?"

Her brother nodded.

"Stephen," she said slowly, "we're all of us Marneys."

"Just what Piers said himself," murmured Stephen.

"It's my name—and yours. Piers has made what reparation he can."

There was a gentle knock at the door. Mr. Whitehouse entered, and, stood for a moment in silence.

"Piers Marney," he said quietly, "is dead!"

## CHAPTER. LII.

### MR. WHITEHOUSE ADVISES.

THE lawyer closed the door, and bowing gravely to Beatrice, addressed himself to Stephen.

"Sir Stephen," he said, "I have some advice to offer you as the head and representative of this family."

Stephen looked amazed.

"Isn't that a bit premature?" he asked.

"I think not," said the lawyer, seating himself. "I regard your succession to the Marney inheritance and title as a legal certainty. Piers has given me information that will establish your claim and your identity. I foresee no serious difficulty."

Mr. Whitehouse adjusted his spectacles with a slightly tremulous hand.

"Sir Stephen," he said, "and Miss Beatrice. I have long been the legal adviser and financial agent of the house of Marney; so were my fathers before me, time out of mind. It is a good name; a name that both of you will have to bear. Is it not a thousand pities to let it be dishonored?"

"There is nothing we wish less than that," said Beatrice, "but—can we help it?"

"I think we can." Mr. Whitehouse looked at Stephen. "Will you tell me all that it is necessary for me to know of your meeting with this poor crazy creature they

call Matthew, and how you came to invade Mersea with him? For I have only your statement to the police, and I suppose there is more to tell?"

Stephen did not reply hastily. The lawyer's warning had started an active train of thought in his mind. He looked at his sister and reflected. Then he gave Mr. Whitehouse a short account of his meeting with Matthew Flint on Old Hall Marsh, his knowledge of the man's identity, and the events that followed upon the meeting. He did not elaborate his story, but told it very briefly and simply.

The narration had a visible effect on Beatrice; she controlled her amazement with some difficulty. The lawyer, however, heard Stephen out to the end, and for some time sat silent. His lips tightened to a thin line. He removed his spectacles, polished them slowly, and replaced them.

"You have this paper?" he said at last.

Stephen laid before him the confession of Sarah Flint.

Mr. Whitehouse perused it with close attention.

"This," said the lawyer gently, "is a most undesirable document."

Stephen stared at him.

"It's the thing we've been scouring land and sea to get," he answered; "I looked upon it as the winning card. The trump ace, that would put the game in my hands."

"Yes," said the lawyer; "yes—if Piers Marney were alive, and fighting your claim. Made public, verified and proved, it would have placed you in possession, and Piers Marney in jail for twenty years.

"It would also," he added, tapping the yellow paper with his finger, "leave as vile a stain on the name of Marney as ever an honorable family suffered under. I think we can do without this paper. Piers is dead."

"I ask nothing better!" said Stephen. "You're sure?"

"Piers has surrendered and made reparation. I believe I have evidence enough. I may have to place this also in the hands of the court which will examine your claim. But I think I can promise it will go no further."

"I'd give half the Marney fortune to

have it so," said Stephen eagerly. "There's Dickie Maxon to be thought of, first of all. But do you mean to say a thing like this can be hushed up?"

"Sir Stephen," said Whitehouse gravely, "justice is inexorable when there is a crime to be atoned for. But it does not pursue the dead. The courts in this country have great discretion. There is no rival to your claim, no case to fight—only the establishment of your identity to be insured. Consequently, all this horror need not be blazoned out to make a sensation for the public and the press. Will you leave the whole affair in my hands, and be guided by me?"

Stephen and Beatrice assented with one breath.

"There is the man from whom you obtained this information about Matthew Flint and the letter. Cripps, I think, was his name?"

"Aleck Cripps," said Stephen.

"Send him to me. I will deal with him."

"There remains," said Mr. Whitehouse, "only the inquiry that will be held to determine the cause of Piers Marney's death—the inquest. There were only two witnesses to the tragedy. One is Mr. Richard Maxon. Since it is impossible for him, wounded as he is, to attend the inquest, his statement will be taken on commission. Unless it contradicts the very clear explanation already given to the police by Piers—"

"I do not think it will," said Stephen quietly.

"Maxon will answer for himself. The other witness is—Miss Marney."

"Will they make my sister attend?" asked Stephen, before Beatrice could speak.

"I think we can spare her that. Piers's own evidence, if backed by Maxon's, will, I think, be held sufficient. It will rest with the coroner. Whatever questions they ask you, Miss Beatrice, tell them the simple truth. Volunteer no answers that are not required of you.

"And now, since you have both suffered, as I can see, beyond the limits of endurance, I will leave you. You may have perfect confidence as to the future."

Mr. Whitehouse bowed gravely and formally to each of them, and left the room, Stephen drew a long breath.

"That's a sound man," he said, "and—a mighty clever one."

"Almost as clever," said Beatrice, "as Piers."

Stephen did not look at her.

"He's dead—Piers. Isn't there some sayin' about the dead?"

"To speak nothing but good of them?"

"I believe that's it. As it wouldn't be real easy to say anything good of Piers, the best thing is—"

"To say nothing at all. Except—*requiescat*."

"You're out of my depth, but I get you. Betty—"

She laid a hand on his arm.

"Stephen, there was something more than that happened when you met that man Matthew on the marshes."

"Something? Yes. Just a burned hut."

"What do you mean? I know very well you haven't told me everything."

"No," replied Stephen firmly, "and I'm not going to. You nor anybody else, unless I'm forced to, for it's nobody's business but mine. Some day when things are smoothed out, maybe I'll tell you."

"Smoothed out! What of Sloyd—and Puggy Flint? Can they be smoothed out?"

"Why do you ask after Sloyd?" he said keenly.

"Does he matter no longer? Won't he be called to account?"

"I should say he'll make himself mighty scarce. There's a long term of the stone jug waiting for him, if ever he asked for it. Sloyd—Puggy Flint! Do you think I care for such trash as those? They're down and out—they're nothing but broken tools, thrown aside. Betty, I'm not a revenge-monger. I'm just Steve Marney, come into my own after the devil's own cruise; all I care for is to make things smooth for you—and Dickie! There's that little error of Dickie's that worries him so. I'm burying that twenty fathoms deep—nobody will ever know of it now. That's why I'm backing the lawyer-man—who's shown me the way to do it."

"Dickie, yes! Where would either of us be now but for Dickie?"

"Not in Mersea Holt, that's sure."

Her fingers tightened on his arm.

"And do you think I'd have cared to live," she said, "if Dickie had died?"

She turned from him abruptly, and the door of her room closed behind Beatrice.

Stephen sighed.

"Gee, but we're a queer crew, we Marneys! An' Dickie's going to be the most difficult of the lot."

## CHAPTER LIII.

### THE MARNEY WAY.

STEPHEN MARNEY stood on the south terrace at Mersea Holt, in a warm flood of autumn sunshine that shone down through the yellowing chestnut trees. The tragedy was nearly six weeks old; Piers Marney, sleeping with his fathers in the churchyard, was no more than a memory, which now and then came sharply back to those who had taken his place at the Holt. This morning was one of those occasions.

Stephen, with hands clasped idly behind his back, was watching the retreating form of Mr. Cornelius Whitehouse on his way down the drive. The lawyer had spent the best part of an hour with him, and the visits always left Stephen with a sense of solemn gravity rare in him. Mr. Whitehouse was always so formal and precise.

Stephen heard a rustle, and turning, saw his sister beside him, her eyes full of inquiry.

"Well!" said Beatrice. "What news had he?"

"None but the best. They won't need me in London again, though the case may take a week or two yet. Success absolutely assured. They've got me set, as Sir Neville Marney's son and heir of entail. Traced—proved—established." He put his hands on her shoulders and smiled. "You've got a real brother at last, Betty. Success! That's what Whitehouse's report comes to when you boil it down. He's a windy sort of guy when he gets his tongue to work, but, gee, he hits the mark! Everything he told us to count on has come just so. All the rough stuff cut out. Piers's record as dead as Piers himself. An' now I'm going to settle about you, Betty."

"I'm listening, Sir Stephen."

"I wish I could turn the whole blame thing over to you, title an' all."

"Thank goodness, you can't."

"Well, here's what I can do. You know that under Piers's will I get not only the Holt—which was never his to give—but the little Walton Knoll estate that was his own. His wish was that I pass it on to you by deed. He didn't leave it to you direct. Piers thought of everything. Maybe he guessed, knowing how he'd treated you, that you wouldn't take it at his hands."

"And maybe he was right," said Beatrice, "but I'll take it at yours, Stephen. Walton Knoll—a dream of a little place. The house on the cliff gap—the old tower, where you were trapped like a weasel—the most romantic spot in Essex. And the estate, with management and a little hard work, could be made to pay much more than it does now."

"But that ain't enough," said Stephen. "The Knoll estate don't bring in twelve hundred a year. Now, see. Our dad left no will, but it's sure he meant you to have that loose hundred thousand which don't go with the entail. The same," added Stephen, with a twinkle, "that Piers offered you as your share, if you'd shake me an' go back to him at the start. I make that over to you, too."

Beatrice shook her head.

"Nothing doing, Stephen. I don't take it. Please don't you quarrel with me, too."

"You refuse?"

"I have no wish to be a rich woman—not at present," said Beatrice wistfully. "It would only be another obstacle."

Stephen looked glum. He knew what she meant.

His sister turned to him quite frankly. "What news of Dickie? I'm beginning to think he's as crazy as Mad Matt. I've a crow to pick with Dickie."

"An' I hope you'll make the feathers fly," said Beatrice viciously. "Dickie has treated us real mean. I wouldn't have believed it of him."

Richard had, in fact, basely betrayed them both. A fortnight earlier he had descended from his sick room, barely convalescent. On that same day Stephen

and Beatrice were summoned to London by Mr. Whitehouse. They returned the following afternoon, to find that Richard had quietly vanished from the Holt, leaving no word behind.

Four days later they received a letter, bald, brief and dry, saying that he would communicate with them later, and that he considered his presence unnecessary. He gave no address.

Richard's absence left a gap in the House of Marney that nothing could fill. The partnership seemed but a shadow of itself. And Stephen observed very plainly that the light had gone out of his sister's life. Her pleasure in his own victory was somewhat dulled.

"No," said Stephen, "I've no more news. But he'll come back."

"I'm not so sure. Stephen, if he does not—"

"The old Windflower is down in the creek yet. He's bound to return to her—"

"I go down and tend her every day," said Beatrice rather tremulously. "I can't keep away from her. But—"

Stephen, watching her, saw her cheeks flush swiftly and her eyes light up. She was not looking at him at all.

"You were right, Stephen, and I was wrong."

Richard's tall figure was approaching at an easy, unconcerned pace up the drive. He looked a little dusty and travel-stained; his face was rather thin; there were lines under his eyes.

He raised his hat as he came up to them, and, smiling, held out a hand to Beatrice.

She caught both his in her own.

"Betty," said Richard before she could speak, "the Holt suits you better than the old Windflower—you're looking fine." He freed one hand and extended it to Stephen. "I hear you've won, old man."

"Thanks to you."

"Dickie," said Beatrice fiercely, "what do you mean by it? How dared you sneak away like that?"

"There's a time for all things," said Richard. He tried to speak lightly, but his voice was constrained and his smile formal. It did not suit him in the least. "The Holt doesn't suit me as well as it

does you. And I'm so much like Stephen—to an outsider's eye."

Beatrice looked at the pair as they stood before her, and for a moment did not reply. They were both clad in blue serge, as on the first day that she saw them. Never, in form, features and dress, had they looked so amazingly alike as they did at that moment; and never, in the eyes of Beatrice, had they seemed so utterly, basically different.

"Yes," she said slowly, her eyes a little hard, "you are so amazingly similar that in a bad light I am never quite sure which of you is which—till you speak. What of that?"

Richard smiled.

"It might be rather embarrassing, to strangers."

"Why?" flashed Beatrice. She bitterly resented his apparent coolness. "What are strangers to us?"

"Nothing at all. But—you forget."

"What do I forget?"

"Two tattooed snakes in the same household," said Richard. "An impossible situation, Betty. Now, or at any time. See what I mean?"

There was moisture trembling on Beatrice's eyelashes.

"Is this what you came back to say to me?" she asked, holding her chin high.

"I'd better not have come back at all," replied Richard sadly. "I couldn't help it, though."

She turned and walked slowly indoors, leaving the two men together.

Stephen looked at his late partner grimly. "What bug's in your head now, Dickie?"

"One that's been there all the time. I shall never get rid of it."

"Come into the house. I want to talk to you."

Richard shook his head.

"It's a house I can't enter, Stephen. Besides, I'm scared of what you might say to me."

"You're afraid I'm going to offer you a share of half a million that's mine. If you weren't a—fool, I could do it. I'm suggesting nothing of the kind. But—there's work I want you to do, and you're the only

man I know who can handle it. I'm a bungler at such things. You can't let me down, Dickie."

"Work? What work?"

"See here," said Stephen guilefully, "Piers's little old estate, Walton Knoll, is being made over to Betty. It's her property, tower and all. It's worth mighty little, but if a good hustling land agent took charge and ran it Betty might have a nice little income out of it. She's as pig-headed as you are—being a Marney. She won't take anything from me. And then there's the management of the Holt estates, too. I should make a mess of them. I'm a seaman, not a business man. You've got to help us."

Richard regarded him affectionately and smiled.

"It won't do, Stephen. There are two places on this earth I can't stay in—Walton Knoll and the Holt. I couldn't stand it." He put his hand on his partner's shoulder. "Don't you see that I love your sister—that life doesn't mean anything to me except Betty Marney?"

"Then," said Stephen under his breath, "why in the name of sense don't you tell her so?"

"Because it would be useless."

"And I tell you, you're a fool."

"It's better to be a fool than—one or two other things. And even if by a miracle it weren't useless, Stephen, it would be a crime. I've had enough of crime. You know what I am—so does she."

"Yes. You're—"

"Richard Marney, a relative of the family. I'm sticking to the name, as it's mine—but nothing else. I'm also the son of the man who drew Piers's pay. I'm the impostor who would have taken your place—and kept it. Don't interrupt, Stephen. I've been whitewashed; the record's buried, as far as strangers are concerned. But that doesn't alter the thing, I am. And, as I live, Betty shall never have her name linked to anything like that. She deserves the best the world can offer."

"And now I'm going down to the Windflower. I shall be away at least a year. I sail at the turn of the tide. Never mind where I'm going. You can come down and

help me get the anchor; Betty, too, if she will. I can't say good-by to you here. You'll both be welcome, on condition there's no more of this. Will you come? Five o'clock, then—I sail at five thirty."

He gripped his partner's hand, and, turning, walked away rapidly down the drive.

Stephen watched him go without a word. He came very near to feeling an active hatred toward Richard at that moment. And yet, the head of the Marneys could not fail to understand his relative's point of view. That did not help.

Was the fellow blind, he wondered, or was he only thinking of himself? But that was the last thing Richard ever thought of. Feeling strangely helpless and miserable, Stephen wandered along the terrace and passed in through the tall portals of Mersea Holt. In the library he found Beatrice standing by the window. She turned as he came in.

"Where is Dickie?"

"Gone," said Stephen through his teeth. "He has no use for us."

He told her what Richard's intentions were.

Beatrice came slowly toward him, her face very white.

"Gone?" she repeated. "And—didn't he ask to see me before he went?"

Stephen was silent.

Suddenly she put her arms around him, and he felt her trembling.

"Stephen," she said, her face on his shoulder, "I wish Piers's bullet had killed me."

There was a longer silence. Then Beatrice asked: "Is that all?"

Her brother's arms tightened round her. "I am going to tell you just what the fool did say," answered Stephen. "There's no reason why I shouldn't."

He gave her, very quietly, a faithful account of Richard's explanation. Beatrice heard him out, and lifted her head.

"He said that?"

"Yes. What can one do with such a fellow? I'd have given the Holt twice over rather than lose Dickie."

"You are going down there at five?"

"I've got to. I suppose—you don't want to come with me?"

Beatrice reflected.

"No. I won't come with you; but—I might follow you."

Beatrice arrived on the shore of the creek a little before high water, and looked thoughtfully at the distant Windflower, anchored away down in the Quarters.

The hardway was deserted, and the dinghy was not on the beach. Beatrice borrowed a light shooting-punt, its owner not being there to object, launched it deftly, and sculled down to the anchorage. The dinghy was riding astern the Windflower, but neither Stephen nor Richard were on deck. As Beatrice stepped lightly on board a distant church chimed the three-quarters. She climbed down the companion-ladder and opened the door of the saloon. The porthole curtains had not been opened; the interior was singularly dark and gloomy. In a deck chair in the center lay a dim, despondent figure.

"Stephen," said Beatrice tremulously, "it's no use, is it?"

She took three steps forward, and, sinking into his lap, put her arms about him and buried her face in his shoulders, sobbing lightly.

"Stephen," she said in a muffled voice, "once I thought that if my dream came true, and I found you, I would ask nothing more of life. But—if Dickie goes, I don't care whether I live or die."

She felt him trembling. And raising her head suddenly she pressed her lips to his. His arms tightened round her fiercely, clung for a moment, and then as swiftly relaxed.

"Betty!" he said hoarsely. "Stephen— isn't here. I'm—not Stephen!"

"Did you really suppose I didn't know that?" she said softly.

He crushed her to him and their lips met.

"Betty! My love, my love! Lord forgive me, I can't leave you!"

"I never had any intention of letting you," said Beatrice.

There was a long interval.

"Are you happy, Dickie?" she said.

"Happy?" he said wildly. And then: "Betty—"

"Yes, Dickie?"

"I'm afraid—"

"You? Never in your life. What are you afraid of?"

"Betty, are you sure that some time you won't—remember?"

Beatrice laughed gently. She lifted his chin, and two slim fingers drew down the collar of his jersey, baring his brown throat.

Beatrice pressed a soft round kiss on the head of the tattooed snake.

Stephen, standing up in the stern of a shore boat, brought her neatly alongside the Windflower's quarter. He looked at Richard and his sister, standing by the shrouds, and decided that he had never seen two more radiantly happy people. He grinned.

"Stephen," said Beatrice, "though I'm

afraid you won't do it very well, you'll have to play the heavy brother, after all."

"I guess I'll do my best," said Stephen.

"Do you really know how to give away a bride?" asked Beatrice.

Stephen motioned them to get into the boat. When they were both safely in the stern sheets together he looked reflectively at Richard.

"It beats me," he said with brotherly frankness, "how you could ever have thought you would get to windward of Betty."

He sculled them ashore. The boat touched gently, and they stepped out upon the sand. The sinking sun gilded the creek with soft fire.

The three Marneys, linking arms, wandered up the hill to Mersea Holt.

*THE END.*

## RECOGNITION

IN Bermuda, where the sea  
Is a bowl of sun-kilned blue,  
I will conjure up a slew  
Out in Kansas or will be  
Buried to the waist in snow  
While observing roses blow.

In Vermont, when every hill  
Is a greenery that hides  
Fern and moss and tinkling rill,  
I will scud on Fundy tides;  
In a smoking Catskill log  
I will smell Pacific fog.

In the western desert, hours  
From the nearest settlement,  
I will watch the fairy towers  
Of a city from my tent;  
Through the silence hear its hum  
Urgent like an Arab drum.

In New York, the town itself,  
Rubbed and deafened by its rush,  
I'll surrender to the hush  
Of some high Sierra shelf.  
I now recognize my breed  
In the wind-blown tumbleweed.

*Richard Butler Glaenser.*





# Samaritan Stuff for 'Cilla

By JAMES W. EGAN

**I** SUPPOSE the trouble is with me, as Vic Jordan says, that I'm always trying to do too much for other people. Continually pouring out the milk of human kindness, as it were, only to have it sour horribly on me most of the time.

Uh-huh!

It's what one gets for having such a darn soft heart, and a head that ain't much more than one-half of one per-cent harder. But maybe some day I'll learn. Maybe some day I'll get sense.

This last experience of mine oughta cure me. If ever a girl made a lob outa herself in a misguided effort to help another jane get along, believe thou me, I was that—

Well, they'd put this Priscilla Parish working alongside of yours weakly in the

Trojan cafeteria, which happens to be one of the ten or fifteen thousand help-yourself-hungry-parlors kidding the appetites of the Los Angeles public. I was passing out the grapefruit, sliced orange, half-baked apple and the like while she dallied with such sterling products of the oven as hot rolls, snails, coffee cake, cinnamon buns and—oh, if you ever toted a tray you know the list!

She was a new girl, of course. And it didn't take little Jackie Dugan—who is me—more than ten minutes to decide she was scared, homesick and nearly ready to cry. So right away my spongy old pump began to act up.

I could almost tell she was a stranger. Likely had just come to California from

Iowa or some such place. She was pretty enough, but the way she dressed, and her air, spelled small town to me. And I imagined how she must feel miles and miles away from every one she knew.

All through the morning pandering to various palates I managed to throw in a cheery crack now and then, getting a few shy returns, and when our lunch hour arrived just before the noon rush I carried my truck to a table where she was all alone.

"Hope you don't mind me hornin' in on you," I remarked. "As long as we must toil side by side in this grab it garage I figured we might as well get acquainted. Listen all right?"

"Why, I—I do want to become better acquainted." She was shy. "I am strange here, and some of the girls don't seem to want—"

"Oh, there's a lotta biscuits in this burg who are harder than a bride's first," I told her. "But there's several good fellows among us. We ain't all weeds. I guess I know how you must feel, if you're a stranger in this town. Just come to Los?"

"I arrived two weeks ago. I was living in Iowa, Nebraska, and my father died, leaving me all alone. I had a few hundred dollars and I was sick of Naylor. And crazy to see California. Out I came. The trip took quite a bit of my money, so I found myself a job. I like Los Angeles, but—but it's lonesome at first."

"Sure it is," I said, listening patiently to her highly thrilling narrative. "Maybe we can brighten things up a bit. My name's Dugan. What's yours?"

"Parish. Priscilla Parish. Nearly everybody in Naylor called me 'Cilla. I like it better."

"It is better. I got a whale of a name myself. Jacqueline Dugan. Ain't that a tongueful? Too much moniker for a little girl like me to stagger under. So everybody shortens it to Jackie at my earnest request. How big a burg is Naylor? Know any fellows there?"

I rattled along, breaking through her reserve, and finally sprung something.

"You dance, don't you, 'Cilla?"

"Oh, yes. But I haven't since leaving Naylor."

"How would you like to go along with me some night this week to the Cinderella Roof? I usually go with a boy friend, and he knows a coupla nice fellows who shake a mean foot. I think I could—"

I could see 'Cilla from Nebraska hesitate. She eyed me just a bit doubtfully.

I tumbled quick. I guess I look as flapperish as any of the barlows Elinor Glyn writes letters to, with my bobbed hair and the same kinda skirt. No doubt I'd be considered an eight-minute Eva in Naylor, but clothes don't make the man—or woman—either.

However, I thought I could appreciate Priscilla's point of view.

"Listen, 'Cilla," I uttered. "Vic Jordan—the boy friend I go with—is my steady, and he's all right. Any fellow he brings will be—well, this ain't no party. It's just a good time. Now, what do you say? If I frame up a date, do we go?"

The doubt had gone outa her blue eyes.

"Why—I'd love to! It's awfully good of you, Miss Dugan, to—"

"Lay off the flowers, and call me Jackie. I can feature how lonely it can be in Los for a stranger and then—I'd like to be your friend, 'Cilla."

She smiled back at me.

"And I want to be yours—Jackie."

I was feeling real pleased with myself.

"All rightie!" I chirped. "I'll give Vic a ring to-night. Ah, they're wigwagging us, 'Cilla. Back to supply and soothe the ravenous rabble!"

You see, everything started great. The new girl was much happier during the remainder of the day, and I was willing to take the credit for her good spirits.

Vic Jordan dropped around in the evening and I tackled him.

"Got a job for you, young man!" I declared. "I want to take a new girl at the cafeteria to Cinderella Roof some night this week, and it's up to you to find a friend for her. A nice one."

"Ah!" He shook his finger at me. "What's the plot, Jackie? I know there is one. Who's the damsel, anyway?"

"Her name is 'Cilla Parish, and she's real sweet, Vic. A stranger in Los, you know. Just arrived from—"

"Iowa. All the strangers come from there."

"No, she didn't. Naylor, Nebraska, is her home town."

"That's near enough. So you're doing the good Samaritan stuff again, Jackie?" teased he. "What does your friend look like?"

"She's a nice looking girl. Maybe a bit quiet and serious, but a pretty good kid."

Vic frowned.

"Don't know who I might get to go, unless—"

My memory was working O. K.

"What about Sam Cooley? You been telling me Sam hasn't any girl, and that he's the sorta fellow who should meet someone who's nice."

"I was just thinking of Sam. But Sam—well, he ain't any speed boy himself, yet he seems to crave a girl that's lively and full of pep. I suppose your friend is a little slow?"

"That oughta be a recommendation!" I snapped. "You quit stalling, and go to work and line up Sam. It'll be doing the big boob a real favor. If he don't like 'Cilla he's a chump!"

"If he don't like her I'll get mine, you mean," Vic grumbled.

"He'll like her if he has any sense at all. I can size up my own sex pretty fast and I know 'Cilla is a swell kid."

"Have it your own way, sweet creature. But I don't think we can frame anything before Saturday night. Sam is piling a lotta lumber this week. However, I'll do my darnedest. We strive to please, Jackie."

"Attaboy, Vic!" I cried.

This was pretty kippy. I felt I was doing the girl from Nebraska a good turn. Sam Cooley was a big, honest guy employed by the same lumber concern as Vic Jordan. In some ways he was a sorta dumb trick, but always a square shooter. You figure a fellow like him meant for the shy 'Cillas.

How was I to know—well, ain't it funny you never can tell when a fly is gonna come along and fall into your chowder?

'Cilla Parish came to work in such a suspiciously cheerful frame of mind next morning I wondered muchly. At lunch I sleuthed—or started to sleuth. I didn't

have to dig hard. My new friend was willing to let me in.

"I believe I've arranged that little dancing debauch at Cinderella for Saturday night," I hinted first. "Mr. Jordan, my friend, is going to bring along Sam Cooley, a nice boy who works at the same place he does."

"I see." The Nebraska kid nodded. "Perhaps I—Oh, Jackie! I've had an adventure! On my way home last night."

"H-m! And who is he?" I smiled.

"I went into a drug store to buy some powder, and I forgot my bag." The eyes of 'Cilla just sparkled. "I must have been a block away when I remembered. All my money was in the bag, and I was so frightened I wouldn't recover it—and then I saw a young man following me. He had the bag in his hand, and explained he'd picked it up and had hurried after me to return it. I thanked him—"

"What kinda young man was he?" I asked.

"Oh, very gentlemanly and courteous! And quite good-looking. I—you could hardly help liking him. He seemed so agreeable!"

"Uh-huh!" I fooled with my combination salad. "Continue, 'Cilla, my dear."

"Well, he walked a little ways with me, and we talked a bit and he—he said he hoped he might see me again some time. He was so nice I told him maybe he could. Finally he wanted to know if I'd go to a show with him this evening, and I partly promised. He's coming in this afternoon to make sure, he said."

"Worked fast," I thought. "Most of these birds do." Aloud, I inquired: "You going with him to-night?"

"I—I think so. I rather like him, Jackie."

"Then I suppose Saturday night you won't—"

"Oh, I don't want to disappoint you, Jackie! I'll go if I can Saturday. To-night may be the only time I'll ever go out with Mr. Glendon. Once might be enough for him."

"Not unless—well, kinda watch your step, 'Cilla. This ain't Naylor, Nebraska. Some nice guys ain't as nice as they look.

Not that I'm doing an anvil act. I hope you'll have a good time if you go."

I guess I was a bit giggled. It's tough to make plans for one of your beloved sex and then have something unexpected crab the stuff. And I had a little hunch this gentlemanly Glendon would stand the old up and up.

"He *may* be all right—and he may not!" I told myself. "Like that oil can poor Gertie Hill fell for."

Every time I thought of Gertie I scorched up. She had been one of my best friends. A few months before she had gone goofy over a perfect slunge. She was a pretty wise kid, too, but this cake eater made her think he was the bee's wig, and against all my advice she glued to the punk.

Naturally something happened—and it was Gertie who was outa luck. And believe thou me, I had a hatpin sharpened for all wurps on the order of Gertie's "friend"—and I knew Los Angeles was full of such greaseballs.

"I'll sure put the glimmers on Mr. Glendon, for alongside Gertie Hill, 'Cilla is just a two month's old in the cradle," I decided.

So I was on the job when the Nebraska kid's new acquaintance wafted in that afternoon. The moment I got a good look I figured I had him pegged. He didn't cash in with me.

"Give him an eyebrow on his upper lip and you have the twin brother of Gertie's weasel," I reflected. "The trimmer and slicker type. Here's where 'Cilla needs a friend, or I'm a terrible little liar!"

You should have seen him. One of the Wallie boys. The patent leather hair, the "snappy" garb, and probably perfume on his coat. Handsome in a way, but—oh, my!

"What a line he'll pass her—and how she'll eat it up!" was my bitter reflection. "Maybe I'll stick a pin in his balloon, though. We'll see, Mr. Slicker."

With plenty of purpose I quizzed 'Cilla in regard to her outing the next day.

"How do you like your new friend now, honey?"

"He's awfully nice! I do like him."

"Uh-huh! Putting it on for her," I muttered.

"He acts so well-bred at all times," 'Cilla continued. "I suppose it's to be expected. He come from a fine New York family. He told me last night. His father is a wealthy man—a Wall Street broker. Almost a millionaire, he says."

"No! You don't tell me!" I might have sounded sarcastic. "What's he doing away out in sunny Cal?"

"His father and he disagreed a few months ago, and he left home to battle for himself. He's trying to make his way in the movies."

"Old stuff! Oh, how old!" I groaned secretly. Then, aloud:

"In the movies, huh? Between pictures now, I suppose?"

"He ain't an actor, Jackie. Bertrand writes scenarios, or whatever you call them. But he has had hard luck selling them. He says it's so difficult for an outsider to break in."

"Scenarios, huh? One new line, anyway," I thought. "His name is Bertrand, is it?"

"Bertrand Glendon."

"He sure picked a pip. Bertie for short, I suppose?"

"What do you mean, Jackie? You sound sorta funny."

"Oh, nothing much, honey. When you going to see him again? This evening?"

"Mercy, no! We ain't such good friends as that, yet. Besides, Bertrand hasn't much money, and he's too proud to write home. I don't expect to see him before Sunday."

"H'm! Well, still think you'd care to go to Cinderella Saturday night and meet Sam Cooley? No harm in knowing several boys. Often a great help to a frail female."

"Of course I'll go, as long as I promised."

'Cilla didn't seem frightfully enthused. If I hadn't been so anxious to protect her in her innocence I would have dropped the matter. But this Glendon had to be blocked.

I talked it over with Vic that night.

"You better have Sam Cooley show Saturday," I threatened. "I'm just praying he takes a big liking to 'Cilla, like he ought. That will make it easier when this other false alarm blows up with the usual bang."

"If she hasn't any more brains than to

chase around with that kinda tramp—" Vic began, but I stopped him.

"Why, Vic, the poor kid hasn't had any experience! She takes fellows on trust, not realizing some birds can't be trusted. And I'm not to let this bell polisher pull any rough stuff. One worm slicked Gertie Hill, and it don't happen again to a girl I know. And 'Cilla is far less suspicious than Gertie."

"Tell her what this egg probably is, Jackie."

"How smart that would be! Talk don't help. It didn't with Gertie. No, wait until he makes a bum move—and then be ready to act. You have Sam Cooley Saturday night or I'll murder you, Vic!"

And I might have, too. Only Sam did put in an appearance, and the party went through.

It was hardly a bellringer, at that. Sam liked 'Cilla well enough, but I guess she had her fashionable friend Glendon on the brain, and didn't give poor Sam so much of a tumble. A girl will do her stuff, whether from Naylor, Nebraska, or Gotham, New York.

I didn't despair entirely. Sam Cooley might be awkward and lacking in style; but he was a good fellow at heart. Here's where he had it all over the peerless scenario writer with a father in Wall Street, I figured, and I believed 'Cilla would have the sense to see it when the time came.

At the end of a coupla weeks I began to worry. The Nebraskan had let Sam take her out two or three times to Glendon's five or six. And it was as sure as Hollywood has scandals that 'Cilla derived most of her throbs outa the excursions with the alleged scenario carpenter. This was too bad, for Sam seemed to like her, and if it hadn't been for that sealhead gumming up the game, doubtless they would be getting along great together.

"Darn!" I told Vic Jordan one evening. "Sometimes I think her name oughta start out spelled with an 'S' and ending with a 'y'. She's 'Cilla indeed."

"Surely the poor girl don't deserve a cruel crack like that one," grinned Vic. "You know the Samaritan stuff don't always pan out, Jackie. This Glendon is acting all right, ain't he? Perhaps he is on the level."

"As level as a ride in a roller coaster at Venice!" I snapped. "He don't work as fast as most of them, but some of these days he'll overstep—and then watch him blouse it!"

"I've only seen him once, but I don't like his looks much," Vic admitted. "He may be prettier than Sam, and have a better line, but Sam is a good guy. And it's a cinch friend 'Cilla is gonna make him sore before long. If you—"

"I don't know what I can do, unless it is to put arsenic in the grapefruit for him some day. 'Cilla never seems to find any fault with him. It's always something new and nice he's done. Lately she's been telling me what he did at college. What a wonderful athlete he was. Can you imagine that cookie an athlete?"

"Yes; Mexican brand," Vic chuckled. "I'll bet the day he went through college they locked everything up. They must have given him a degree of B. T.—bull thrower."

"Just let him give me one opening and I'll crab him!" is my earnest young vow.

Opportunity was due to push the buzzer quicker than I really expected, though I did look for a break on Bertrand's part every minute.

A morning or two after my last chat with Vic the Nebraska girl came to work with a faintly anxious expression in her eyes. For the first time she appeared doubtful. I could hardly wait until our lunchtime to give her the third degree.

She loosened up pretty promptly.

"Bertrand has gone away for a while," she confided. "Went to San Francisco this morning. Or he told me last night he would. I—I—" She paused.

"What's the matter, honey?" I queried gently.

"I wonder if I've made a mistake. Bertrand seemed to act a bit strange last night. He told me he had a chance to go to San Francisco and write a scenario for a new concern up there, but—but he didn't have enough money to make the trip, and I—"

"You didn't give him any money?" I exclaimed.

"I—I did. I loaned her a hundred dollars outa my savings. He refused to take it at first. Finally he did, saying he would

pay it back as soon as he could. Oh, I guess he will, Jackie, only—"

"Yes, he will!" I cut in. "You can kiss that hundred farewell, 'Cilla. I was afraid he'd pull that stuff all along."

"You don't think he has been lying to me?" she quivered.

I just broiled.

"That slunge! I oughta have told you what I thought of him long ago! Only I was afraid you wouldn't listen. Well, hon-ey, he has gypped you outa the money, and now you see what kinda egg—"

"Jackie! You can't mean he was deceiving me all along!" the poor kid moaned.

"Why, he has told me he loves me and as soon as he gets on his feet—oh, Jackie!"

"The weasel!" I grit. "I'm sorry, 'Cilla. But a guy like him is never any good. It's the fellows like Sam Cooley who—"

Suddenly she flared up.

"I hate Sam Cooley! And you are his friend, and boosting him while you knock Bertrand! I shouldn't have said a word to you! Even if I did loan him the money it's all right. I won't believe he was lying! He wasn't, and I know it!"

"That's our sex for you. Can't beat us for abrupt shifts at times.

Of course I tried to soothe 'Cilla, but she didn't gobble soothing syrup worth a cent. All the rest of the day she frowned in silence, and when she went home had hardly a word of good-by to give me.

That soft heart of mine ached for the Nebraska girl, just the same. I made allowances for her outburst. In a day or two she'd be calmer, and better able to understand.

After dinner I gave Vic Jordan a ring, and asked him to bring Sam Cooley over with him to my house. I didn't know exactly what I had in mind, but I hoped to do something for poor 'Cilla.

Vic and Sam showed up a little after seven o'clock.

"We just saw your beloved Mr. Glendon on the way here," spills Vic, right off the reel. "Had a new hat on, and was all slicked up. Stepping out this evening, I suppose?"

Sam Cooley scowled.

"You saw Glendon?" I gasped. "The

sharpie! That Frisco stuff was a stall, of course. Do you boys know what that greaseball has done?"

"What's up, Jackie?" Vic realized I was fairly burning.

It didn't take me long to pour out the whole story, and I guess I expressed my opinion of Bertrand Glendon with more than girlish vigor.

"He's the kind of slunge Gertie Hill got hold off!" I concluded. "Ninety-nine outa every hundred birds like him are the lowest kinda cheats!"

"Slapped the bee on her for a hundred men, huh?" Vic whistled. "The rascally punk!"

"I'm surprised he has the nerve to stick around now—that he didn't blow!" I snapped. "Somebody oughta knock his block off, and take that money away from him. If we only knew where he lived, or stayed!"

"I think I know where he lives!" spoke up Sam Cooley. "I'm going to call around on him to-night." He started to go.

"Good boy, Sam!" I cheered.

"And I'll go with you!" uttered Vic. "We'll—"

"No, Vic! I want to look after him alone," Sam stated, very grim. "I'll see he gets what's coming to him if I can locate him."

"Remember he's a great college athlete. Be careful, Sam," sarcastically observed Vic as Cooley left us.

"Oh, boy! I hope he gives it to him!" I breathed.

"Don't think that a big lumber juggler won't!" declared Vic, squeezing my hand.

And imagining a Wallie boy of Glendon's general make-up in the vengeful hands of the husky Sam I almost felt a tiny bit sorry for him.

For a coupla of hours Vic and myself waited, but Sam failed to return.

"Guess he couldn't find the punk," my friend remarked as he was going. "In case he did, though, and I find out about it in the morning, I'll call you up."

"Better you do! They don't like calling us girls at the Trojan, but this time is an exception."

When I reported for the daily dishing

out at the cafeteria next day 'Cilla was not in her usual place. Nor did she show up. Worried, I asked about her. Nobody knew.

"Maybe she's sick," said the boss. "Hasn't a phone, either."

Well, perhaps she wasn't feeling so good. Little wonder. I had her address, and I made up my mind to go out and see her as soon as my chores in the chow emporium were over for the day.

A few minutes after nine o'clock I received a ring from Vic Jordan.

"Any news?" I demanded.

"Plenty." His voice sounded queer. "Sam did find Glendon last night, Jackie."

"Good!" I contributed.

"Not so good, either. Guess this Glendon is an athlete or something. At any rate, Sam sure took a beating! You oughta see him! No wonder he didn't come back last night."

"That Bertie thing licked Sam?" My, I was surprised!

"If he didn't Sam's face is a terrible liar, Jackie. Seems Sam found him and started bawling him for taking money from a girl—and Glendon sailed right into him. And then it happened. Sam is pretty sore at me and you and 'Cilla and the world to-day. He thinks it's a mistake of some kind, and that Glendon—"

"Mistake nothing!" I retort. "The big mistake is that Sam ain't the fighter he oughta be. Too bad you didn't go with him, as you intended."

"Maybe it ain't so bad as you think. I mighta been licked, too. I guess 'Cilla can have her Glendon now, if she can catch him. Sam Cooley insists he's through."

"The big coward!" I said angrily, and hung up forgetting to mention the Nebraska girl hadn't come down to work.

My customers must have found me grouchy during the rest of the morning. I lunched alone, and when the noon jam was over I was in a grumpy humor. Hardly anyone was eating, and I had plenty of time to think.

"Beg pardon!" A voice startled me into activity.

Then I observed the speaker carried no tray. He was a large, stern looking man, well-dressed, and a dead image of an actor

who had played the part of a detective in the last movie Vic Jordan had taken me to.

"Your name ain't Parish, is it?" queried this person.

"No; she works next to me, but is off to-day," I replied, quite curious.

"She knows a young man named Glendon, I believe. Perhaps you know him?"

"Yes, I know him."

This man was a detective! I had it. And the athletic Bertrand was being sought for some crime. Perhaps he was a far more dangerous character than we'd dreamed.

"You do? Good!" The stern face lightened. "I'm mighty anxious to find him. He—"

"Looking for him, huh?" I remarked.

"Detective, ain't you?" I added slyly.

"A detective! Why, my dear young woman—"

He didn't finish. For into the cafeteria walked Bertrand himself, still as sleek as ever. And hanging on his arm, seeming as happy as folks with oil on the old farm, was 'Cilla Parish!

"Bert!" cried the stern old guy.

"Well—dad!"

You oughta seen them shake hands!

I was a trifle dizzy by now, but I managed to listen in on what was said.

"How did you ever get out here, dad?" demanded Bertrand.

"The minute I got your letter saying you wanted to marry a girl who worked in a cafeteria, I left Wall Street flat on its back and dashed out to—"

"Not to try to stop me, dad, surely? It's to late, anyhow. 'Cilla and I were married this morning!"

Nobody noticed me stagger, I guess.

"This is the girl you married?" The elder Glendon glanced at the Nebraska miss.

"My wife 'Cilla!" proudly introduced his son.

"Lucky young dog!" The old man grinned. "No, I didn't come out to stop you if you found the right kinda girl—and you certainly have, if I'm any judge. My main reason was to patch up our little difference, coax you back to the firm, and tell you to forget this movie junk!"

"I don't know as I can, dad! You see, yesterday morning things were pretty hopeless. Dear little Cilla here had staked me to a hundred dollars to go to San Francisco on a wild hope, and that hundred caused something of a flurry in some quarters, when most unexpectedly arrived a check for a thousand dollars from a studio to which I had submitted a scenario weeks and weeks ago.

"Naturally I didn't go to San Francisco. I talked it over with 'Cilla last night—following a little trouble with a misguided gentleman who paid me a visit—and we decided to be married this morning. Why wait when you love each other? She was just coming in her to tell them that she was quitting. How did you—"

"Your letter mentioned the name of the cafeteria, and when I couldn't find you at your own address I journeyed here, hoping to see the girl, at least," uttered the Wall Street parent.

'Cilla had fluttered toward me.

"Jackie Dugan, I ought never forgive you for almost making me lose faith in Bertrand," she whispered. "But I'm too happy to hold it against you, even if you did tell that horrid Sam Cooley, too. I guess he'll know better than pick a quarrel

with my husband the next time. I never did care for Sam, Jackie. I knew Bertrand was the only man in the world for me. We are going to live in Los Angeles, unless Bert's father insists, because the company wants more scenarios. And I want you to like Bertrand, and come to see us, Jackie."

She smiled friendly enough as the party went out, but somehow I felt I wouldn't be as welcome as the first rose of spring around the Glendon home, despite all 'Cilla's nice words.

Think of everything turning out this way!

Bertrand Glendon really wrote scenarios, he was a college athlete, he had a father in Wall Street—and he wasn't a slicker!

Only once in a hundred times could a Wallie boy like him be the goods, and Bertrand had to outguess me and be it!

And merely because I was a kind hearted Samaritan and wanted to protect an innocent jane from perils and pitfalls, I had made a fine dumadora of myself and was just about out with the three leading characters. I include that yokel, Sam Cooley.

As Vic Jordan says—well, never mind what he says. But believe thou me, I thank Allah, his trusty shoulder still remains to weep into!

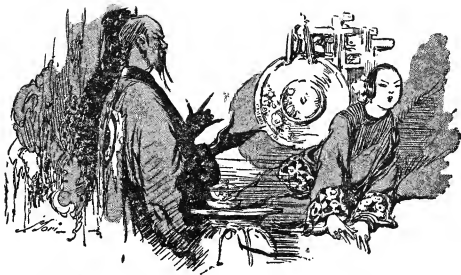


## LITTLE THINGS

I WHO have been a guest in Sorrow's house,  
 And learned of her most gallant ways and wise,  
 I who have seen Death cross my guarded sill  
 And read his mission in his steady eyes,  
 I have not learned to bear with everyday,  
 To cope with malice or the smile-masked sneer,  
 To reckon with the clever, oblique slight  
 The covert shrug, the lying, barren tear  
 Of patronizing pity. I have yet  
 To bid my soul take brave and steady wings  
 With which to rise above the petty hurts  
 The ceaseless friction of the little things.

*Faith Baldwin.*





# In Poppyland

By **FRED B. MANN**

**I**T was midnight—Far Eastern time—in the opium joint of Won Lung, Shanghai, China, and throughout the den all was quiet. Not as quiet, perhaps, as a nursery, but unusually calm for an opium den.

Business had been good that evening. Every bunk in the long sleeping room had an occupant, now tucked safely in for the night with a pipe in his hand and a small pile of pills on a stand beside his pillow. In that quarter naught could be heard but the soft pad-pad of some attendant as he stepped in to see how his pretty charges were faring or the gentle "sno-sno-sno" of the sleepers as each gave audible expression to the pleasure he was experiencing in Dreamland.

In the private domicile of Won Lung, a series of rooms at the rear of the poppy-palace which were separated from the smokers' retreat by a long hall as crooked as a pretzel, that worthy sat in a quietude even more so than that of the customers' room.

Won Lung was constructed exactly to the specifications as laid down by all the architects who ever drew the plans for a Chinese story. Small slanting eyes—cruel, hard eyes—thin lips, high cheek-bones behind a yellow parchment skin, a mustache hanging down each side of the mouth to form an anæmic horseshoe, a cue down the back, and finger-nails three inches long.

It was the finger-nails that now caused the only noise in this certain room, for as the Chinaman sat at the table preparing opium pills for the next night's trade, ever and anon he would stretch forth a taloned hand to scratch what to a white person would have been an inaccessible part of the body—that No Man's Land between the shoulder blades. And then would follow the soothing rasp of the nails as they struck his vertebra.

These lengthy nails served another wonderful purpose. As is well known, an opium pill must be as near to perfect roundness as possible in order to insure its smoker

a temporary trip to Paradise. There is no special reason for this—it is just the custom. Opium smokers have always demanded their pills round and they would no more think of smoking a square opium pill than golfers would put up with a square golf ball.

And so now, after Won Lung had crudely worked each precious pill into something resembling a sphere, he would invert his fore finger and the poppy pellet, rolling down the trough-like nail, would, like a shot dropped from a tower, come to perfect roundness at the bottom.

At length, the supply of passes to Paradise having reached sufficiency, Won Lung ceased their manufacture and stood up. He began to walk the floor, thus disclosing his habiliments which heretofore had been largely hidden by the table.

It was apparent that he was garbed for bed. His feet were encased in velvetten slippers. A pair of pink silk pagodas flapped aimlessly about his cadaverous limbs, while about his upper body was fastened, with buttons of jade, a green night tiffin, also of silk and ornamented with dragons' heads.

But though dressed for slumber, Won Lung did not retire. He continued to pace the floor, pausing now and then to gaze impatiently in the direction of the door leading to the winding hall. Evidently he was expecting a visitor.

Impatience is rewarded as often as patience, and, besides, few Chinese have ever heard of Job. A few minutes more of the pacing up and down, then a ponderous tread sounded without the door and there entered the personage expected.

A personage indeed—O Long Lee, the wealthiest silk merchant in all the city.

Fat in folds and rolls was O Long. In fact, so embonpointed was his whole frame that the flowered coolie which enveloped it bulged throughout its entire environment and the gusset at the back tugged at its moorings. He grunted a greeting to Won Lung and waddled to a chest of teakwood at one side of the room. The hinges of the chest sighed as he lowered his huge bulk upon it.

In the hand of O Long Lee was a large

bag. A cheerful chink as of coins milling about in it sounded as he placed the bag on the chest beside him. He gazed at Won Lung with his little slanting pig eyes.

"A thousand taels for your daughter, Sen Toy," he wheezed to the other, who had seated himself behind the table.

"Oh, ricksha!" was the only comment of Won Lung. He began to roll an opium pill up and down the trough of his nail as though that were the most important undertaking in the whole celestial empire.

O Long Lee gave him a dynasty look from his porcine eyes, but could not conceal the desire that lurked within them.

"And the Sayings of Confucius in three volumes, printed on silk," said O Long Lee, as though he had merely been interrupted.

"Oh pooh, baah!" exclaimed Won Lung, and gazed at the ceiling.

"And—" O Long Lee hesitated, then—"and the piece of jade from the throne of Ting Chow."

Won Lung's glance lowered to a level and for the first time his face showed interest.

"The things you have mentioned and the gold abacus on which you cast up the accounts in your shop," he said.

Desire battled now with cunning in the puny soul of that mountain of flesh on the chest. Desire was the victor. The deal was closed. Over firecrackers and tea, with Jacquer in it, it was agreed that on the following midnight O Long would bring a sedan-chair with bearers. In return for the treasures mentioned, pretty little Sen Toy would be borne away in the chair to be forevermore the property of O Long.

Unknown to the buyer and seller, there had been a witness to this hideous bargain. Little Sen Toy, dainty Chinese lily blooming unsoiled amid the muck of the opium den, had had one of her pink shell-like ears glued to a tiny aperture in the wall which separated her bedroom from the room where sat O Long Lee and her father.

She had retired early in the evening, obedient to Wong Lung's order. At midnight she had awakened—as she did every midnight, unknown to her father—to observe the flowering of the strange plant that

reared its slender stalk from a sampan on the window ledge of her bedroom.

Sweet little Sen Toy had no companions, had no mother living, had no freedom. Her cruel parent kept her confined within the precincts of their living quarters. Naturally she had turned to two things that are ever solaces to the lonely—a plant and a pet.

Now in China there flourishes in the gardens of the well-to-do a plant known as the concubine which flowers only at night. Sen Toy, a few days before, during one of her rare escapes from the surveillance of Won Lung, had discovered just within the gate of the Chinese wall of a rich man a concubine twining itself above the door. She had carefully and tenderly uprooted it and borne it to her bedroom.

Of course the concubine is seldom very green, but even so it brightened the sad life of little Sen Toy to have a growing plant, and every midnight, after she had placed it in the sampan, she had risen to see it bloom.

And a pet also had come into her life—a pet silkworm, that had come crawling over her window ledge one day and at once spun a hold upon her heart.

Silently Sen Toy wept as she sat on the edge of her bed, now, in her dainty kimono of robin's egg blue. O Long Lee had waddled from the adjoining room, her father had gone to his avaricious dreams on a couch behind a screen there. She had not a friend in the world to help her avoid the horrible fate that threatened her, except the concubine and the silkworm. And how could they help her?

She had cried for some minutes—into a Ming vase, for salt is precious in China—when suddenly she remembered something. Maybe she did have a friend who could help her—a near-friend, at least. One she had made only the morning before, Chink-A-Ping.

Chink-A-Ping, gay, smart, New China personified, was the young man who came late every night to get the opium den's laundry and who brought it back the next day. For it was the habit of the patrons to thus have their shirts washed and ironed while they, themselves, were absent in Para-

dise where a shirt would have been superfluous.

Sen Toy had often seen Chink-A-Ping as he came and went, but not until the morning in question had she leaned from her second-story window overlooking the stone-paved court in the rear of the opium den. Chink-A-Ping had looked up and seen the little beauty. And then, removing the shell from one of his almond eyes, he had slowly winked at Sen Toy. And she had blushed and smiled, to draw back, a few seconds later, behind the leaves of the concubine.

What white teeth he had! How straight and black was his hair! No shaven pate, no cue down his back, all New China! She had been happy all day about that wink.

Yes, Chink-A-Ping would help her, she felt sure. Consoled, she lay down and fell asleep.

Early the next morning Sen Toy was at the window. And along came Chink-A-Ping, a large hamper of snowy-white laundry on the flat top of the two-wheeled chow mein which he pushed before him.

Sen Toy leaned out with a cautious look-see about to make sure they were not observed. Then, as he stopped, she told Chink-A-Ping, in a sweet spilling of syllables resembling a laundry ticket, the horrible future in store for her.

If this were fiction, Chink-A-Ping's cue would have been to show the yellow streak here. To acknowledge supinely that he could not rescue her from the clutches of the rich and powerful; to suggest that the only escape would be that they commit suicide together in a welter of tears and that fluid thicker than water.

But Chink-A-Ping had no cue, in the first place, and secondly, he was no hero of a typical yellow-blooded romance. As soon as the meaning of Sen Toy's plaintive words became clear to him he made haste to answer, to reassure her with a plan—a plan minus the usual gloomy prospects of a permanent outing in the hereafter.

Unfortunately, however, Chink-A-Ping was so excited at her words, so full of his plan, that he answered Sen Toy in the "pidgin" English which he had learned in his dealings with foreigners.

"Mashee—me freen—me savvy—can do—me chop-chop. Catchee top side—" he replied, and then, alas, in the middle of this jargon, before Sen Toy could ask him to speak in Chinese, she heard her father's step outside the door of her bedroom. She was compelled to draw back into the room, with hope a dead thing in her heart.

"Be ready," said Won Lung when he had entered, "to go to the home of O Long Lee at midnight. You are to be his."

Sen Toy broke into no flood of tears; no pleadings rose to her rose petal lips. In China a child must obey its father. There is no appeal from the parental decision. So she simply bowed her head in acknowledgment of the orders and turned to get ready her clothing.

But when Won Lung had departed, Sen Toy watered the concubine with her tears and cried so copiously over her pet silk-worm that it had to leave off spinning in its nest and could do naught but spin around in the resulting damp of its retreat.

All hope was gone. Chink-A-Ping would not help her; he had answered her pleas in a manner evasive.

The sad day drew to a close. Darkness came, pursued by lights. That weird night bird, the poppycock, began to sound its mournful note in the branches of the pongee tree in the alleyway outside. Clouds of incense rose above the wicked city to mingle with the smoke from thousands of opium pipes.

And in her bedroom, helpless, alone, Sen Toy, waiting the beginning of an end which to her was worse than death.

Ten o'clock struck from the tower on the joss house near by. Then the half-hour. Then eleven. But an hour then—

Suddenly Sen Toy raised her bowed head. The faint squeaking of the wheels of the chow mein sounded in the court below. The squeak drew nearer, nearer, then died away below her window. The chow mein must have stopped there. Sen Toy crept to the window ledge and looked over.

"Hist!" came the voice of Chink-A-Ping from below, his black store clothes, another foreign note, rendering him naught but a shadowy figure in the dimly lighted court.

"Here is Wen Foo, the old fish-seller on the Boho wharf. She will help us."

The heart of Sen Toy gave a great leap. Chink-A-Ping was going to try to save her. He was talking real Chinese now.

"Creep down and unlatch the side door," whispered Chink-A-Ping.

Sen Toy opened her door and peered into the outer room. It was empty. She crept down the stairs to the side entrance and unhooked that door.

"Hurry," ordered Chink-A-Ping when he had squeezed her hand deliciously. "Take Wen Foo to your room, show her everything, then—"

Words died in his throat. Someone could be heard coming toward the back door of the den from within. Chink-A-Ping pushed Sen Toy and Wen Foo within the side door but a second before the other door opened and an attendant came out with the soiled laundry. He had heard the approaching squeak of the chow mein.

In the bedroom above Wen Foo rapidly told Sen Toy further details of the plan. But as the latter turned to the door and looked into the other room, terror seized her. The details could not be carried out as scheduled. Her father had returned and now sat behind the pill-rolling table waiting the arrival of O Long Lee. And it was but a half hour until midnight! All Sen Toy could do was to go to the window and whisper, heart-brokenly, to Chink-A-Ping, waiting with his hamper of soiled shirts below, that her escape down the stairs was hopelessly cut off.

So the end was to be tragic, after all. Somehow or other, one can never get away from tragedy in the East. At midnight came O Long Lee with his bearers and the sedan-chair and the purchase price. And in return for the thousand taels, the three volumes of the Sayings of Confucius, printed on silk, the jade from the throne of Ting-Chow, and the gold abacus, Won Lung allowed the pathetic looking figure, her frame shaken by sobs beneath the white costume which covered her from crown of head to tip of toe, to be taken to the sedan-chair. Unnatural father that he was, he gave his daughter not so much as a look.

The possessions the table held charmed his glances.

And there came near being more tragedy in the bedroom of O Long Lee after he had sent away his servants and had waddled, with licentious eyes, to lift the head-dress from his purchase. For when he saw the weather-beaten face of Wen Foo grinning with toothless mouth from behind that lifted veil, he seized a huge club of lotus wood and was for braining her on the spot.

But he didn't brain her. Wen Foo was ready for him—with a long fish-knife from out her sleeve. He glared a moment, then let her go with no more damage than a few curses for her ancestors. And being fat, he was philosophical. He lumbered to a seat and consoled himself with the fact that the thousand taels were counterfeit; the three volumes of Confucius not authentic sayings of that great one at all, the jade from the throne of Ting Chow but an agate marble dropped by some foreigner's child in the street, and the gold abacus a thing of wood gilded.

So the end was not tragic, after all. The drop of little Sen Toy from her bedroom window into the hamper of laundry on the two-wheeled chow mein had done her no

harm, since it contained nothing but soft shirts.

And there were no signs of tragedy on the faces of Chink-A-Ping and her as early next morning they leaned, close side by side, over the rail of a Chinese junk which Chink-A-Ping had purchased the day before from a junk dealer.

The sun was rising over the Celestial Empire from which they were sailing. And how fitting it seemed that, after being only three hours married at the foreigners' mission, a great breeze, incense-laden from the city, should be wafting them onward on this wonderful honeymoon.

Yet suddenly Sen Toy shivered and clung even closer than formerly to Chink-A-Ping.

"What is it, beloved?" he asked anxiously, as he put both his arms around her and pressed a kiss upon her quivering rose petal lips.

"Will not my father and O Long Lee hire highbinders to reach with their tongs for for us even in America?"

Chink-A-Ping laughed and gave her a reassuring hug.

"There is a place," said he sagely, "along an underground railroad leading out from New York where no one can find anybody. There we will live."



## FLOWERS I WOULD BRING

FLOWERS I would bring if flowers could make thee fairer,

And music, if the Muse were dear to thee—

For loving these would make thee love the bearer—

But sweetest songs forget their melody,

And fairest flowers would but conceal the wearer;

A rose I marked and might have plucked; but she

Blushed as she bent, imploring me to spare her,

Nor spoil her beauty by such rivalry.

Alas! and with what gifts shall I pursue thee,

What offering bring, what treasures lay before thee;

When earth with all her floral train doth woo thee,

And all old poets and old songs adore thee;

And Love to thee is naught; from passionate mood

Secured by joy's complacent plenitude!

*Aubrey Thomas DeVere.*



# Common Kid Gloves

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

TAKING the long curve at a terrific rate of speed, Oakes Radell drove into the next straightaway and laughed aloud above the roaring of the motor when he found that the highway was deserted as far as he could see.

It was not the enthusiastic, care-free laughter of the happy motorist atune with the spirit of the rushing wind; there was something cynical about it, something sinister in it, a suggestion of evil things. He might have been sure that the highway would be free of other vehicles and pedestrians at that particular point, Oakes Radell told himself. Had it not been, a portion of his plans would have been ruined. His luck, therefore, was with him still—the good luck he had feared had deserted him.

He did not continue to follow the broad, smooth highway that twisted like a great serpent along the sparkling river. Once around the curve, he applied the brakes and forced the powerful roadster down to a decent sort of speed. He guided the car into a narrow, little-used road that curved into a brush-bordered ravine. Here, he was hidden effectually from the sight of those who might pass on the main thoroughfare a short distance away.

Oakes Radell laughed once more, softly, as the brakes screeched and smoked, and the big car rolled slowly to a stop. Radell was out of it instantly. He lighted a fresh cigar, and over the cupped hands that held the flaming match he peered closely into the brush at either side of the ravine, making

certain that there was nobody near to observe him.

Satisfied, finally, that he was not under the close scrutiny of some other human being, he reached quickly into one of the pockets of the car and took out a small wrench. He had placed that particular wrench there purposely, so that no time would be lost. A moment later he was laboring to disconnect the speedometer, his laughter suddenly stilled and his countenance grim.

The work done, Oakes Radell sprang back into the car, stowed away the wrench, then quickly let in the clutch. He drove ahead for a short distance to where the ravine widened, then turned and roared back to the main highway. Into it he swung the roadster, and rushed along the smooth road toward the city thirty miles more to the north.

Oakes Radell, well-known as a man of big business, whose time was counted in terms of dollars and cents, was going to a great deal of trouble to purchase a pair of common kid gloves.

He was motoring eighty miles from the city he called home, and where his business was established, to another and much smaller city where the shops were not so good, but where he intended making the purchase.

He had planned this thing well, spending many valuable hours over the plans. He had taken care of all the minor details. It was the neglect of minor details that wrecked most men, he declared to himself, and he did not intend to be wrecked! All his plans were perfect now, he thought. Any brainy man, Oakes Radell believed, who could force himself to set aside the heat of passionate anger and think and plan sensibly, could do what he contemplated doing and escape the consequences.

He had decided to kill Harrison Hadler.

He had to do it to save himself financially. He felt not the slightest compunction about it. Harrison Hadler was in his way, a menace, and so Harrison Hadler had to be removed at once. That was the sum and substance of the situation, the actual situation stripped of all superfluous facts.

Oakes Radell was a huge man of forty-

five, a fighter in the business field, inclined now and then to the use of methods that were a bit unscrupulous. Harrison Hadler was a man of the same sort. They were bitter foes. They had clashed on the market repeatedly, each trying to cut the other's financial throat. And now, because of a trick, Harrison Hadler held Oakes Radell at his mercy—and Radell knew that Hadler would be inclined to show no mercy, at all.

But Harrison Hadler, for all his business ability, had made one sad mistake in this affair. He had taken no associate fully into his confidence. And so Oakes Radell happened to know that, if Hadler could be put out of the way suddenly, his big deal would go to smash and many men would be saved financially—among them Oakes Radell. With Harrison Hadler dead, his associates in the big deal would not know for some time which way to turn. In that moment of consternation, Oakes Radell expected to stampede them, and not only save himself but also take a handsome profit.

The deed he had planned was the culmination of years of hate and evil wishes. Often before, he had half promised himself that he would slay Harrison Hadler one day. And now the time had come, and Oakes Radell expected to commit the crime and escape the consequences.

He had read that there is no such thing as a perfect crime, one that cannot be detected. But he did not believe it. He knew, on the other hand, of crimes innumerable where the guilty ones never had been discovered and punished.

And he flattered himself that he had planned the thing well. He was going to be very bold about it. His plans were fool-proof, his arrangements had been checked over until, he told himself, there was no possibility of a mistake that would be fatal. And his luck was with him!

He reached the outskirts of the smaller city, and instead of following the boulevard that would have taken him straight to the center of the retail district, he turned off into a side street and drove toward the poorer part of the town, toward a section where cheap shops and junky stores predominated.

Oakes Radell was dressed in an inconspicuous suit, and he wore a dark motoring cap that was pulled down over his forehead. He believed that he would not be noticed particularly in a crowd. He wanted to purchase a pair of thin kid gloves, but he did not want the world to know of his purchase.

Stopping the roadster in the middle of a block, Radell crossed the street to a cheap department store. He had been watching the newspapers of this town, and he knew that to-day there was a sale of men's gloves at this particular store.

He entered and drifted down an aisle toward the glove counter. There was a throng of men before it, as bad as women at a bargain day rush. Oakes Radell smiled inwardly when he saw that his luck was still with him.

A quick glance at the throng told him there was nobody near he knew. Oakes Radell did not frequent this part of the city on his visits, and few men who knew him did. He realized that it would look peculiar if an acquaintance saw Oakes Radell buying a cheap pair of gloves at a bargain counter. But he trusted to his luck.

He edged closer to the counter. There was one huge tray of gloves—black kid, light weight—that attracted his attention immediately. The sign on them said one dollar ninety-eight cents. Oakes Radell had the exact change ready.

"Pair of those—nines," he told the clerk. "Never mind wrapping 'em up!"

He took the gloves and handed over his dollar ninety-eight. A moment later the gloves were in his coat pocket, and Oakes Radell was hurrying from the store.

In his roadster once more, he turned back toward his home city. Once out of town, he traveled fast, always with an eye for traffic officers. He did not want to be overhauled and put under arrest, but he did want to make as good time as possible.

Again he came to the rough road that ran into the brush-bordered ravine. Again, he found that the highway was deserted. He chuckled as he guided the car out of sight of traffic. His luck still was with him!

Now he coupled the speedometer again, drove back to the highway and rushed

toward the city. Late in the afternoon he rolled up to the garage where he kept his cars. A mechanic hurried forward.

"Have a good drive, Mr. Radell?"

"Very good. But I think there's a fouled spark plug."

"I'll look at it this evening, sir."

"The gas consumption is the main thing. Afraid the mixture is a bit rich. Let's check up on it."

"Yes, sir."

"Remember what the speedometer read when I left?" Radell asked.

"I wrote it down on this card, sir—eight thousand five hundred sixty."

"Um!" Radell grunted. "And we have just a hundred more now."

"So I see, sir."

"Now check the gas and let me know to-morrow. I know how much I had in the tank when I started."

Oakes Radell walked slowly around the corner to the bachelor apartment-house where he resided. He went up to his suite, and not until he was safely inside his living-room, with the corridor door locked behind him, did he indulge in the luxury of a smile.

So! That mechanic would swear, if necessary, that he had driven the roadster only one hundred miles. And the round trip to that other city was one hundred sixty. That gas tank had been fuller than the mechanic had known.

Just a little thing, but it was one of the minor details. And Oakes Radell had planned an abundance of them. He sat down in an easy chair, lighted a cigar, and thought it all out again.

They might suspect him when Harrison Hadler was found dead. But they would not be able to fasten evidence upon him. He had spent the afternoon riding out of the city, a thing he often did when he was involved in some big financial scheme. A score of men could swear to that habit of Radell's.

He had purchased a pair of gloves, but they never could be traced to him, he believed. And he would use those gloves that night, and drop them at the scene of the crime. He had plenty of gloves, but he did not want to use an old pair of his own. He might accidentally drop one



while making his escape, and that would spell disaster. The business of the gloves was only a minor detail, but the way he had gone about it showed how thorough Oakes Radell was in this affair.

For a time he thought of Harrison Hadler. He had hated him for years! Between the two men there had existed a peculiar enmity that had started from no man knew what. Even Hadler and Radell did not know.

And now that Hadler had the chance to crush Radell, the latter was ready to remove Hadler. The killing of Hadler was no more to him than the robbing of some minor financier through an unscrupulous deal. He would emerge from the affair victorious, he would be saved financially and his fortune augmented—and Harrison Hadler would be out of his way forever!

It was a little past five o'clock in the evening. Oakes Radell left his easy chair and retired to the bathroom. He bathed as usual, lighted another cigar, and dressed carefully. At precisely six by the clock he descended in the elevator as he had done almost every evening for years.

He spoke to the elevator boy, to the clerk at the desk, stopped at the door to draw on his gloves, and then went off down the street, walking briskly and swinging his stick. He walked six blocks to his favorite club, entered, surrendered hat and coat and stick, and went into the lounging room.

Half a score of men were there, and Oakes Radell greeted them distantly, like a man who has big business on his mind. He read the evening papers for about an hour, then went into the dining room. At his usual table, Oakes Radell ordered his dinner from the usual waiter.

Another member sat down opposite, and Radell held some slight conversation with him.

"Busy days on the market," Radell confided. "I've been planning all day, and I'm mighty tired. Meant to go to the opera, but instead I'm going home and to bed."

"I can always sleep well at the opera," the other said, chuckling.

Oakes Radell lingered in the lounging-

room a short time after he had finished his dinner. He engaged in a minor political argument, discussed golf, and made a subscription for some benefit or other. He was trying to appear natural, calm, ordinary—and he succeeded.

About nine o'clock he got hat and coat and stick and went out upon the street. An acquaintance walked three blocks with him and turned off. Oakes Radell went directly to the apartment-house and stopped at the desk to ask whether there were any telegrams. He knew there was none, but he wanted to register on the clerk's mind the hour at which he had returned.

"Half past nine," Radell said. "A little early, but I think I'll retire. Got a big day ahead of me to-morrow, I'm afraid. Do not let me be disturbed."

"Very well, sir," said the clerk.

"Of course if my secretary, Mr. James, calls, I am to see him immediately," Radell said, as an afterthought.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk.

Oakes Radell thought that was very good. If anything happened in the questioning line, the clerk would repeat that conversation. It would serve to show that Oakes Radell was in his suite, that he had been ready to talk with his secretary if the man wanted to see him. Oakes Radell happened to know that the secretary would not call—he was out of the city for the night.

In his suite, Radell undressed and donned dressing gown and slippers. Then he snapped out the lights, threw up the shade at one of the windows, and sat there looking down at the glistening lights of the avenue.

Once more he contemplated the plans he had made, went over what he had done already—to be sure he had neglected nothing, and considered what he had yet to accomplish. He could find no error, not the least flaw. He felt a glow of triumph.

Then he thought of Harrison Hadler again. How he hated the man! His years of hatred had culminated in an intense will to destroy his enemy. And he would accomplish it within a few hours.

Harrison Hadler, a childless widower, lived in a suite in a building two blocks away. He had a Japanese servant who

did not sleep in the apartment. Radell knew that. He knew, also, having found it out himself, that Hadler retired at eleven o'clock without fail. He was regular in his habits, because he had been threatened with ill health, and was the sort of man to obey his physician without question.

Puffing at his black cigar, Oakes Radell forced his tumbling nerves to a state of normalcy. He wanted to go about this thing in a methodical manner, as he would go about some business deal. There were just so many steps to take, so many things to be done in a certain way. So far, there had been no slip—and Radell determined that there should be none!

"A man who uses his brains can do anything and get away with it," he muttered to himself. "Not a chance for a mistake—not a chance! In a short time it will be over!"

The clock chimed the hour of eleven. Oakes Radell tossed away the end of his cigar and went into his bedchamber. He dressed swiftly and carefully. He put on a cheap black suit that he had not worn in years, a dark cap, black shoes with rubber heels.

Then he opened the small safe in one corner of his bedchamber and took from it an automatic pistol. The pistol was loaded and in perfect condition, and wrapped in a bit of silk cloth. Radell removed the silk cloth from the muzzle, holding a handkerchief in his left hand so he would leave no fingerprints on the gun. With the piece of silk he polished the pistol well from muzzle to butt. He was taking no chances. He did not want a mark on the gun.

Having polished the weapon to his complete satisfaction, he put it down on the end of the bed. He took the bit of silk to the fireplace and burned it. He did not want some detective finding it, saying that there were drops of gun oil on it, and that it once had been wrapped around a gun.

When the bit of silk had been burned, Radell blew the soft ashes away carefully. He was smiling slightly as he turned from the fireplace. He was even careful to put the burned match in the ash tray on his smoking table.

"Minor details!" he muttered. "Pay attention to the minor details and everything will be all right!"

Now he got out the new gloves he had purchased, looked at them carefully, and started to draw them on. They were the size he had ordered, his correct size, yet they seemed small. Radell tugged at them, stretched the fingers, worked his hands into them and finally got them to suit him. They were tight, thin, yet gave his fingers free play.

He picked up the pistol and slipped it into his coat pocket, buttoned the coat, and made sure that the weapon did not bulge the garment. Once more he smiled slightly. He was forgetting nothing—his luck was still with him!

Radell was ready now. He found that he was not nervous at all, that he had steeled himself for the deed. He slipped to the door, listened for a moment, then opened it slightly and peered into the wide corridor. There was nobody in sight. He could see the elevator diagram, and it told him that both cars were at the bottom.

Radell stepped into the hall and closed the door behind him, listening for the spring lock to click into place. Like a shadow, he went along the corridor and to the rear stairs, used only by servants and tradesmen.

Down the stairs he hurried, making not the slightest noise. At the bottom he hesitated to listen again. A moment later he was out in the dark alley.

He had to walk a block, cross a well-lighted street, and then go another block through an alley to reach the rear of the apartment-house wherein Harrison Hadler resided. But he did not hesitate. When he reached the cross-street, a sort of danger zone, he found that there was nobody in sight. Luck still was with him!

Presently, he was in the rear of the building he sought. Standing in the deep shadows, he looked at the rear and side of it. He knew where Harrison Hadler's suite was located, knew the windows that belonged to it, and now sought them out. And now he found everything as he had expected and hoped to find it. The window of Hadler's bedroom was open half way. Hadler was a "fresh air fiend."

The windows of the Hadler suite were all dark, and those of the suites adjoining were dark, too. Oakes Radell made sure that the pistol was in his coat pocket where he had placed it, then moved nearer the wall of the building. He was glad, now, that he always had kept in physical trim. For here was a job for an athlete.

He listened a moment longer, then crouched and sprang. His fingers caught and clung to the projection of a standpipe. Oakes Radell, calling upon all his strength, pulled himself up until he could grasp the bottom of the fire-escape.

A moment later he was standing on the lowest fire-escape landing, breathing heavily. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the dust from the palms of his gloves. Then, crouching in the shadows, he waited until his breathing returned to normal, until his heart stopped pounding at his ribs.

The rest was easy, he told himself. He had only to go up the fire-escape to that open window on the floor above. The entire length of the fire-escape was in deep darkness, too, no light from the street arcs striking it. Oakes Radell would have chuckled again, only he thought it best not to do so.

Up the fire-escape he went silently, taking his time about it, careful to make no sound, stopping now and then to listen. And after a time he stood beside the open window, his goal. Here he gathered his courage again, steeled himself once more. The room was dark; the only sound he heard was stentorian breathing.

Radell parted the curtains and slipped over the sill and into the room. With his back against the wall, he stood rigid, making sure that the sleeper had not been disturbed. Certain of that, he reached across and lowered the window an inch at a time until it was closed entirely. Then he drew the shade.

The moment was at hand now. Yet Oakes Radell moved with caution and did not forget the minor details. He crept across to the other door and listened there, hearing nothing. He fumbled along the wall until he found the electric switch, and suddenly snapped on the lights of the bedroom.

Stepping swiftly up beside the bed, Radell

waited. Before him was the man he hated, asleep. He could do the deed now, and make his get-away. But he wanted more than this man's death. He wanted Harrison Hadler to know who had slain him. He wanted to see a look of terror in the face of his enemy.

Hadler's breathing became broken; he stirred. Presently, he rolled over on the bed, and his hand clutched at one end of a pillow. Oakes Radell waited calmly, cruelly. Hadler opened his eyes.

There was surprise in his face at first, and then he struggled to sit up on the edge of the bed. Radell stepped back a pace and watched. Harrison Hadler's eyes were blinking in the bright light. And now he seemed to realize the identity of the intruder. Sleep left him, his brain was functioning normally.

"You!" he gasped. "What—what is it? What are you doing in here?"

Radell stepped closer. "Can't you guess?" he snarled, speaking in low tones.

"I don't know—" Hadler stammered.

"Think you'll wreck me, do you?" Radell said. "Going to break me, eh? Here is the showdown, Hadler! I've hated you for years, and now I'm going to make you pay the price. Your associates don't know all your plans. So I'll save my financial self, stampede them, take an enormous profit. There's a comfortable thought for you to take with you—where you are going!"

"You—you mean—?"

Oakes Radell took the pistol from his pocket, but did not take his eyes from Harrison Hadler's face. Hadler glanced down at the weapon, and his face went white. His lower jaw dropped, his eyes seemed to bulge.

"You—you mean to kill me!" he gasped.

"This automatic is equipped with a silencer, you'll notice," Radell spoke calmly. "A silencer is not so good on a pistol as on a rifle, but it helps some. Even if the shot is heard, I'll be gone before anybody can decide where it was fired."

"You—you'd kill me!" Hadler gasped, again.

"Why not? You've tried for years to ruin me."

"Because you're a crook in business!" Hadler said.

"Not more so than you! We're both business crooks, and you know it! I've planned this thing well, Hadler! I could have shot you while you were asleep, but I wanted you to know—"

"You'll go to the chair!"

"Nothing like it! I've made my plans, and luck is with me!"

Suddenly, Harrison Hadler sprang from the side of the bed, sprang straight at his adversary. It was the move that Radell needed. He had been unable to pull the trigger while his man sat quietly and talked. But action gave him the incentive.

The pistol spat twice. Harrison Hadler tottered, and would have crashed to the bed had not Radell seized the falling body and eased it down to the rug. Radell knew that a fall might attract the attention of somebody on the floor below.

Radell glanced quickly around the room, then looked down at the man on the floor. He made sure that Hadler was dead. Then he tossed the pistol on the bed. He did not have to worry about that pistol. Some months before, on one of his automobile trips, he had found that pistol, with the silencer attached, beside the road where he had stopped to rest. Some fleeing crook had dropped it there, Radell supposed. Let them trace the pistol, the fools of detectives! They never could trace it back to him!

Now he snapped out the lights and listened at the door. No sound reached his ears to tell that anybody in the building had been aroused. He crossed swiftly to the window, rolled up the shade, opened the window slowly and carefully, and got out on the landing of the fire-escape.

He was fully as cautious on the return journey as he had been on the journey to Hadler's suite. He was not at all nervous, not shaken by a sense of blood-guilt. Killing a man had not shocked the cells of his brain.

He went down the fire-escape carefully, and from the last landing dropped to the floor of the alley. He removed the gloves and threw them into a trash can standing there. He waited a moment, and then crept

through the alley like a shadow, crossed the dangerous, lighted street, went through the other alley, and gained the rear of his own apartment house. Into it he slipped, hurried up the stairs, got into his own suite, and locked the door behind him.

He did not stop to rest. There was no reaction setting in. Reaction, he knew, might be a fatal mistake. So he kept busy. He brushed the old suit and put it away, also the cap and shoes. He was careful to remove every speck of dust. He prepared for bed, mussed the pillows and covers, wiped the perspiration from his face, and mussed up his hair. Did anybody happen to drop in on him now, he would look as though he had just got out of bed.

All that done, he sat down in an easy chair and lighted another cigar. He almost laughed. The thing had been absurdly easy! Luck had been with him! He had remembered every minor detail. There had been no slip!

The pistol could not be traced back to him. And he had tossed the gloves into the trash can. If the detectives found them, they would be a clew that might lead anywhere except in the direction of Oakes Radell.

Everything had gone off smoothly. In the morning, he would act in a natural manner, go to his office and prepare for the financial battle, and pretend surprise and shock when he heard the news of Hadler's death.

He would speculate as to the murderer, as other men would do. He expected to be questioned by officers, because it was well known that he and Hadler were enemies. But he was not afraid of the questions! Luck was with him yet!

## II.

BEFORE he ate breakfast the following morning he felt a bit shaky for a time, as though his conscience had rumbled once or twice. But there was no violent reaction, and he told himself that the worst was over.

Nor was there time for reaction during the day. The news of the murder was made public at an early hour. There was a

riot on the market. Oakes Radell found himself fighting like a wild beast to protect his financial interests.

Twice during the day he thought for an instant that he was not going to be able to weather the storm. But Harrison Hadler's associates were disconcerted, and Oakes Radell struck at the right moment, before they could formulate a new campaign. He smashed down stocks and he smashed Hadler's associates—and emerged from the contest a heavy winner.

Four o'clock in the afternoon, with the tumult at an end, he sat in the private office of his suite, discussing the Hadler crime with two of his brokers.

"I just about hated Hadler myself," he admitted. "Hadler had a lot of enemies. Of course, I know nothing of the circumstances except what I have read in the newspaper extras, and the rumors, but I'd say offhand that some burglar shot him."

"Might be," one of the brokers said.

"The police will get the fellow, probably. Hate to hear of any man being shuffled off like that, of course—but his death certainly saved us!"

The brokers nodded. Oakes Radell lighted his cigar afresh and started to continue the discussion. But the door opened, and his private secretary stood framed in it.

"Detective Sergeant McGuire and another officer to see you, sir," the secretary said.

Radell had been expecting it. He welcomed it. He would meet the detectives, convince them of his innocence, let them chase away after useless clues. He told his secretary to show them in, and they entered immediately. The two brokers took their departure.

Oakes Radell motioned toward two chairs at the end of the long table in the middle of the room, and the detectives sat down. Detective Sergeant McGuire took the chair nearest Radell.

Saul McGuire, as most men knew him, was fifty and had been in the department since the age of twenty-two. There was nothing sensational about the methods of Saul McGuire. He was no Sherlock Holmes. He gathered facts, compiled them,

investigated them, and in a heap of chaff found a grain of truth. A simple and direct method that was neither swift nor spectacular, but got results.

"Want to talk to you about the Hadler murder," Saul McGuire said. "You've heard of it?"

"Naturally. It created a sensation in the market."

"I understand you cleaned up pretty well."

Oakes Radell's face flushed and a suspicion of anger showed in his manner. "Mr. Hadler and myself were leaders of two rival groups in the market," he said. "I admit that his death proved profitable to my side. I would not have taken advantage of it, I assure you, except that I was compelled to do so to keep from being wiped out myself. If the police wish to know the inside of the deal—"

"Don't care anything about it, Mr. Radell," Saul McGuire cut in. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"Go ahead."

"You and Hadler weren't the best of friends?"

"Quite the contrary. We did not like each other personally, and we were business enemies always."

"You're frank about it."

"Why not? I have nothing to hide. I'll be still more frank—I just about hated Hadler! I choked up with wrath every time I set eyes on him. But I'm sorry to hear that he was murdered."

"Have any personal quarrel with him lately?" Saul McGuire wanted to know.

"No, sir! I have not exchanged words with Mr. Hadler for three months or so. We took pains to have luncheon at different cafés, and all that. We fought our fight in the market, through our brokers."

"I understand. Mr. Radell, I want to eliminate you, if I can, from a list of suspects. I can do that, possibly, by asking you some things."

"Go ahead."

"Where were you yesterday afternoon? I have ascertained that you were not here at the office."

"Easily explained," Radell replied. "When I have a big deal on I have a habit

of getting into a roadster I own and roaring over the country roads. It helps me think. Yesterday I took a ride up the river drive."

"How long were you gone?"

"I got back to the garage around four or five, I believe. The mechanic can tell you. I spoke to him about a fouled spark plug. We mentioned, too, that I had gone just a hundred miles while out, and I said I wanted to check up the gasoline consumption—thought it was too great."

"Then what—"

"Went home, bathed and dressed, went to the club for dinner and to loaf a while, then returned to my apartment. I retired early and got up at the usual hour. All this can be verified if you care to go to the trouble."

"Were you ever in Mr. Hadler's rooms?"

"Once—about three months ago. It was peculiar, too. For the first and only time in our lives, Hadler and I happened to be on the same side of the market. Neither of us guessed the fact until the time came for a showdown. I went to his rooms one evening with one of my brokers to decide with him how to handle the men we had caught short."

"Haven't been there since?"

"I have not!" Radell said.

"Mr. Radell, we found some finger-prints in the room where the murder was committed. As a matter of form—"

"You want my finger-prints?" Radell interrupted. "Certainly!"

Detective Sergeant Saul McGuire, his face inscrutable, motioned to the other officer, who happened to be a finger-print man. He went forward, carrying his little case. Oakes Radell submitted with a soft smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

The fools! If they had found finger-prints there, they were none of his! Perhaps, when they found that out, they would rush away on some wild-goose chase.

The finger-print man concluded his work and stepped back to the table. Oakes Radell wiped the smut from the tips of his fingers and looked questioningly at McGuire. But the detective sergeant was watching the finger-print man. Finally the latter turned to McGuire and nodded. The detective sergeant faced Oakes Radell again.

"Now and then, Mr. Radell," he said, "we find a man who imagines that he can plan and execute a crime in such a manner that he never will be detected. But there always is something, it seems, to point the finger of guilt at him. Perhaps it is Providence. Perhaps it is because no human being is perfect and hence no human being can make perfect plans. There generally is some little thing overlooked—some little thing that wrecks the whole."

"I suppose so," said Radell. He was almost at the point of laughter. The minor detail! The little thing! He had attended particularly to the minor details.

"I believe that it was so in this case," Saul McGuire continued. "The murderer left the gun with which he committed the crime. And we also found a pair of gloves."

"A pair of gloves?" Radell said, still smiling.

"I'll show them to you, Mr. Radell."

Saul McGuire took a package from his pocket, unfolded it, and Radell saw the new kid gloves stretched on a piece of oiled paper.

"Common, cheap kid gloves!" said Saul McGuire. "New ones, at that. Ever see them before, Mr. Radell?"

"I scarcely think so."

"They do not belong to you?"

"Certainly not!" Radell laughed. "My Heavens, sir! Those are old-fashioned gloves—black kid of a style a dozen years old. Think that I'd wear a pair of gloves like that? If I did, it'd be all over town that I was going broke, my loans would be called in, and I'd probably be asked to settle my club bill every evening."

He laughed again, but Detective Sergeant Saul McGuire did not change the expression of his face. For the first time, watching that face, Oakes Radell felt a twinge of fear. But he told himself in the next instant that it was preposterous. He had planned well, and he had made no mistakes!

"Let me get this right now," said McGuire. "You never saw those gloves before?"

"No, sir!"

"They are not yours, and you never have touched them?"

"Certainly not!"

McGuire turned to his associate. "You heard that, Peters?" he asked.

"Sure did, Saul!"

"Will you kindly tell me what all this is about?" Oakes Radell asked.

"Certainly!" McGuire replied. "It is my opinion that the man who killed Mr. Hadler made his plans very well, indeed. I assume that he wore gloves so he would leave no finger-prints in the suite or on the gun. As a matter of truth, there were no finger-prints on the gun."

"You said a short time ago that you found prints."

"We did," said McGuire. "Notice these gloves, please. They are new gloves, possibly purchased for the occasion. Difficult to tell where, for it is a common pattern and make of glove, though out of date. Thousands of stores undoubtedly have some of those gloves on their shelves. Possibly this pair was bought years ago and never used until now."

"New gloves, as we all know, are a nuisance the first time you put them on. The confounded things are tight, and we have to force down the fingers of one glove with the opposite hand. We get on the right glove, and then with the gloved hand we force down the fingers of the left. I hate new gloves."

"But—" Radell objected.

"Oh, yes, to get to the point! Well, Mr. Radell, the man who killed Harrison Hadler wore these new gloves. He had trouble, I suppose, getting them on. He

forced down the fingers of the right glove. He left the finger-prints of his left finger tips on the soft, new kid of the right-hand glove."

Oakes Radell felt another spasm of fear, but McGuire was not even looking at him.

"So we have the finger-prints of the murderer, despite the fact that he took such great precautions," McGuire continued. "There's always some little thing that points the way to the guilty man. You have said, Mr. Radell, that you never saw these gloves before, never owned them, never touched them. Yet your finger-prints are on those gloves, Radell! The prints of your left finger tips are on the fingers of the right-hand glove. There are other prints on the back of the right-hand glove. This officer took your prints a moment ago—and they correspond!"

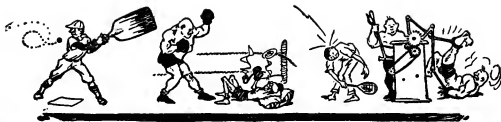
"You certainly made a sad mistake, Radell, when you used nice, new gloves, the surface of which would take a print easily. And you made another sad mistake when you discarded the gloves so near the scene of the crime."

"I?" Oakes Radell gasped. "I, you say?"

"You!" Saul McGuire thundered, getting upon his feet. "You shot down Harrison Hadler! You wore gloves to keep from leaving prints, yet left prints on the gloves. A bit of irony! A pair of common kid gloves has nailed you. Put out your wrists, Radell! Here's where you start for *the electric chair!*"



**G**ET a good laugh by turning every week to our unique sporting feature on the last three pages—Izzy Kaplan's Kolumn. And watch for the start of a new series of detective tales having their origin in Washington. Further particulars later.



## IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

### BRAINS IN SPORT

**I**ZZY had vanished utterly from sight for several days. If a subpoena server had been chasing him to compel him to reveal in open court all his inside stuff on sport the photographer could not have been more invisible.

It was an off-day in the sports world when his professional listener, W. O. McGeehan, missed him. No bats were cracking at the Polo Grounds; the football teams were engaged only in rubbing unfortunate scrubs in the mud; the managers of the boxing stars were doing all the fighting in the fight world; and not even a chess team nor a cue expert was tuning up for action.

Consequently when Izzy entered the office from nowhere, with his derby hat low on his head to hold in some newly acquired secret, his partner was glad to see him. Being a diplomat, however, McGeehan merely glanced at Izzy indifferently and reached for a piece of copy paper. Izzy came right over and sat on a pile.

In a hoarse voice he revealed that his days of absence and meditation had borne fruit—that he had discovered that there was such a thing as Brains in Sport.



**I**T'S a funny thing about brains. You could use them in nearly everything. I chust found out that they are using them even in the baseballing business, and if brains is used in baseball it is a sign that they are getting almost common. That is beginning to worry me a whole lot on account if everybody has got brains and is using them maybe I would have to go to work.

The way I found out about brains being used in baseballing was when I was sitting in the digout with Chon McGraw, which he is meneger from the New York Giants. When the players is at bat Chon starts to give them the wag-wiggig signals like we gave them when I was in the signaling corpse in the army.

"What is all this business?" I esked him on account me and Chon is chust like that and when he has got anything he wants to tell the wold he tells it to me first confidential.

"I am giving that bonehead the signalings for a hit and run play," said Chon. "You didn't suppose that those guys are being paid big money for thinking, did you?"

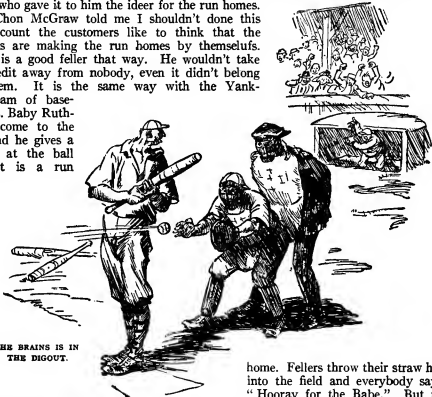
Then I see how it was. The brains from the Giants is in the digout and not in their feet like some feller which he is writing baseballing for the newspapers said they was. If I should seen this feller I would told him about his mistake, because I am on the inside of everything looking out, and when people is wrong I think it is only polite to correction them in a nice way.



You could belief it or not, but Chon McGraw is always making signalings from the digout, and the players is always looking into the digout so they could see what it is they should do next. It was wery interesting to me, and I thought it was a fine ideer, and maybe the other teams might copy it unless maybe Chon McGraw went to a lawyer and got it patented on account people is always stealing good ideers.

A lot of people who pay good money to go to the baseballing don't know nothing about it. They think it is the players that do the business when all the time it is the feller with the brains which he is doing all of it.

The next time I should go to a baseballing when Casey Stengel should hit it a run home, instead I would give three cheers for Casey Stengel I would give them for Chon McGraw, because Chon McGraw is the feller who gave it to him the ideer for the run homes. But Chon McGraw told me I shouldn't done this on account the customers like to think that the players are making the run homes by themselfs. Chon is a good feller that way. He wouldn't take no credit away from nobody, even it didn't belong to them. It is the same way with the Yank-ish team of base-ballers. Baby Ruth-stein come to the bet and he gives a smesh at the ball and it is a run



THE BRAINS IS IN  
THE DIGOUT.

home. Fellers throw their straw hets into the field and everybody says: "Hooray for the Babe." But the

Babe ain't got nothing to do with it, excepting maybe to hit the ball over the fence, and the meneger tells him he should do it by the signaling.

I had a long talk with Chon McGraw, and he is just the same like myself. He never does nothing for his brains. They chust like mine. They came netural to him, and he never took a lesson in thinking in his life, on account he is like me chust a netural-born thinker, always thinking even when he ain't thinking about nothing at all.

That's how my brains got dewveloped, by thinking, and it is the same way by Chon McGraw. You got to sit down to think good on account when you are running around on your feet it jiggles the brains, and when the brains is jiggled they won't think right. The best thinkers is always sitting down, that is why you wouldn't see me standing up a whole lot. I am sitting down to rest my brains and give them a good chence for thinking.

Of course there is a few exceptions to the cheneral rule about brains. Pat Moran, which he is meneger from the Cincinnati team, he couldn't think unless he is stooping over with his head between his knees. His brains is so different from my brains that he can't think unless the brains is upside down.

In football the brains is used by the football coachman, which he is on the sidelines, and when he wants to tell the team to hurry up and make it a touch-it-down, he sends in a substitutioner to tell the captain to tell the fullbacker to smesh through the center rusher for a ten-yard gain. Of course it is supposed that the coachmen should teach the footballers to think for themselufs, but from my personal obseruation you couldn't teach a footballer to think, on account he ain't got nothing to think with or he wouldn't be playing football. He would be hendling freight, which they would pay him good money for it.

Maybe there is brains in tennis, too, but I don't know who has got them, on account the tennisers ain't got no menegers or coachmen to told them how they should bet the ball. It couldn't be that the tennisers have them themselufs on account they are always hopping around on one leg and chumping into the air like a gress-hopper, and a gresshopper ain't got so much brains as a mosquito, because the mosquito is always trying to light somewhere and have a little lunch. Even a flea would stood still once in a while.

In goluf there is lots of brains on account you got to be good with arithmetics, especially in substruction, on account the game is so funny that the less you got the more chence you got to win the pot. I could be a good gelufer if I would take the time, on account you ought to seen how I made the books belence pretty small when the feller from the incoming and outgoing texes came to look them over. He said to me: "Izzy, you almost got me convinced that the government owes you money instead you owe the government money." It took brains to strike it that belence.

You would think that the only sporting business where they wouldn't need no brains would be wrestling, on account them fellers is taking up so much room for their muscles that they wouldn't have no room for no brains. But even in that business they got to have a little bit of brains, on account they got to remember which feller's turn it is to win. If the wrong feller wins out of his turn all the booking for the wrestling champeenships gets mixed up, and they loose a lot of money, so they always have to remember not to forget.

Also in the race-horsing business a jockier has to use it his head a whole lot or the fellers who is publishing the books about the betting would fail in their business when the wrong horse should come in. Horses couldn't do the thinking themselufs, on account you couldn't train a horse so good, and a lot of things could delay a horse in a race. I played one of them wunst, and they told me that something delayed him.

In box fighting the meneger should never told the fighter to use his head. Wunst I seen a meneger who hollered at his fighter: "Use your head." The fighter right away butted the other feller with his head and was disqualifiedioned for fouling. That is the only thing that he knew how to use his head for, to butt with it. A lot of people don't know that the head is sometimes used for thinking with.

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

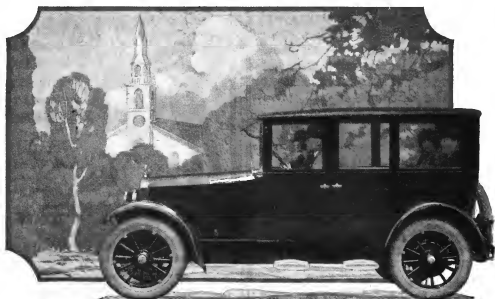
ABE COHEN—In my opinion the nicest present for a little boy five years old would be a second-hend cash register. When you are amooosing the children it is also a nice ideer that they should be amooosing themselufs in a useful way. Benny Leonard, which he is the champeen lightweight, could punch a cash register long before he could punch anybody else, and he is still doing it.

*Next week Izzy Kaplan will comment upon THE DUTIES OF A MANAGER.*



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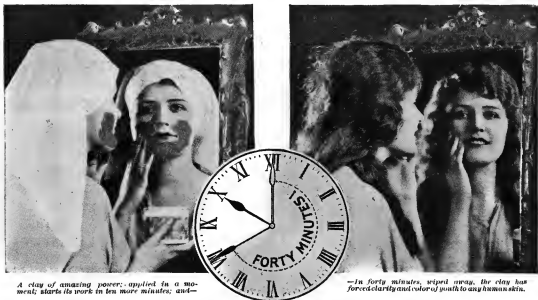
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1810 Hill St., New Haven, Conn.



# A New Skin in 40 Minutes with this Astounding Beauty Clay!

**How a Trip to Sunny Wales Uncovered a Secret that Forever Ends Need for a Complexion Beautifier**

By MARTHA RYERSON

I HAVE brought to America the greatest news women ever heard about the skin. From Wales, where I spent a month without seeing a single bad complexion. I went there with a complexion that had been my despair since childhood. One afternoon I left it in the hills, exchanged it for one of absolute purity and undoubted natural color. Here are the facts:

About the first thing one notices in this southern English province, is the uniformly beautiful complexions. The lowliest maid—and her mother, too—has a radiantly beautiful skin. Mine, lacking luster and color, with impurities nothing seemed to eradicate or even hide, was horribly conspicuous.

It was a happy thought that took me on a long walk through the hills one afternoon. I had stopped at the apothecary's to replenish my cosmetics—to find they did not have even a cold cream. In a land where beauty of face was in evidence at every turn—the women used no beautifiers! Do you wonder I "took to the hills?" I didn't want to see another pencil-and-cream complexion that day. But I did.

At a house where I paused for a drink from the spring, I stepped back in surprise when the young woman straightened up to greet me. Her face was covered with mud. I recognized the peculiar gray of that strong, very fine, sleek, smooth clay it was. Seeing my surprise, the girl smiled and said, "Madam does not clay?" I admitted I did not!

## I Decide to "Clay"

She wet the clay which had dried on her face and neck, wiped it away, and stood in all the glory of a perfect complexion. I shall never again envy another as I did that solid maiden of the hills. Her features were not pretty; they did not need to be. For no woman will ever have a more gorgeous skin. She explained that this amazing clay treatment did it. The natives mud, a weekly habit of "claying" the skin, quite as one cares regularly for the hair.

I was easily persuaded to try it. We tucked a towel over my blouse, and from the spring's bed she took the soft, soothing clay and applied it.

As the clay dried, I experienced the most delightful tugging in every facial pore; impurities were being literally pulled out. Half an hour more, and we removed the clay mask. I followed into the tiny house to glimpse myself in a mirror.

My blanches were gone!

I fairly glowed with color that spread down the neck to the shoulders. My cheeks were so downy soft, Father's surprised look that evening was the most genuine compliment a woman ever received. In a basket I had two bricks of the precious clay. I thought father's questions would never end; where did I find it; could I take him to the spot; what was its action, and reason, and lots else I didn't know. Father is a chemist.

Suddenly it dawned on me. He wanted to unearth the secret of that clay's amazing properties, and take it to America! For two weeks we stayed on; he worked all day at his "mud pie" as I called them. Back home at last in Chicago, he worked many weeks more. He experimented on me, and on all my girl friends. At last, he scientifically produced clay identical with that Welsh clay in its miraculous effects.

## How to Obtain It

News of the wonders performed by this clay has brought thousands of requests for it. Women, everywhere, are now supplied with Forty Minute Clay. The laboratory sends it direct to the user. A jar is five dollars, but I have yet to hear of anyone who did not regard it worth several times that amount. For in over six hundred test cases, it did not once fail. It seems to work on all ages, regardless of how pimpled, clogged or dull the skin.

The application is readily made by anyone, and the changes wrought about in less than an hour will cause open-mouthed astonishment. I know. My father has made you a remarkable offer. Read carefully.

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The general public is entitled to benefit by a discovery of this importance. So, for a limited time we will distribute regular, full-size \$5.00 jars of Forty Minute Clay without profit—at only the actual cost, which is \$1.87.

You may have your first jar for only this bare cost of getting it in your hands! The expenses of compounding, refining, analyzing, sterilizing, packing, printed announcements, and shipping in large quantity, has been figured down to \$1.87 per jar, plus postage.

This is not really a payment; rather, a deposit that we will promptly return if you are not unreservedly satisfied that this miracle clay is all we claim. Send no money now. Pay postman the net laboratory charges of \$1.87 plus postage, when he brings your jar. Or, if unlikely to be at home at mail time, enclose \$2.00 and jar will arrive postpaid, with the same money-back guarantee.

WM. RYERSON, Head Chemist

THE CENTURY CHEMISTS, Dept. 145.  
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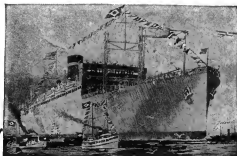
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